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# ALY THE PHILOSOPHER

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# ALY THE PHILOSOPHER

## AND OTHER STORIES

BY

SWITHIN ROBERTS

ILLUSTRATED BY

H. R. MILLAR

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1931

6927

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# CONTENTS


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| ALY THE PHILOSOPHER | |
| 1. THE STEAM-ROLLER | 3 |
| 2. WAR! | 16 |
| 3. FRITZ | 26 |
| 4. THE SERGEANT | 36 |
| 5. THE CATASTROPHE | 43 |
| "SPOTS" | 55 |
| PEROO | 69 |
| A NICE QUIET DAY | 95 |
| FROM MIDNIGHT TO ONE A.M. | 121 |
| THE RIFLE | 137 |
| THE TONGA-DRIVER | 161 |
| THE WHISTLER | 181 |
| HALF A CROWN | 205 |
| THE HAUNTED BUNGALOW | 217 |

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LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| George flew over the Camel's Head | . *Face page* | 6 |
| He threw the Bomb into the Fire . . | ,, | 24 |
| "Sir, I am in, but how shall I get out?" . | ,, | 30 |
| Behind him came a Mass of Excited Men . | ,, | 39 |
| He fell headlong into the Water . . | ,, | 51 |
| The Forest Officer pressed the Second Trigger | ,, | 64 |
| Peroo dived clean and straight into the Sea | ,, | 78 |
| I bent an Earnest Gaze on the Gural . | ,, | 107 |
| A Stricken Field once Night has fallen . | ,, | 128 |
| A Gigantic Figure towered from the Sand | ,, | 155 |
| "Where is your Money?" . . . | ,, | 167 |
| Jules arrived at Top Speed . . . | ,, | 201 |
| "I felt the 'Plane falling, falling!" . | ,, | 211 |
| "My Friend," said I, "Prepare for Death!" | ,, | 230 |

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Accession No. _____

# ALY THE PHILOSOPHER

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## EPISODE I

# THE STEAM-ROLLER

My attention was first drawn to Aly the day George fell off the camel.

We were building a road in the desert, and I was at my usual early morning occupation of telling off the different gangs of men to their tasks for the day. As you may not know the method followed by those who fight the desert in this particular way for a living, I shall, first of all, describe how I built my road.

In the first place, a gang of men went forward under the command of a Greek overseer. This latter's name was actually Dimitri Leonidas Constantinopoulos, but I always called him George. The business of this first gang was to decide how much of the desert surface, along the route mapped out, should be levelled, and forthwith to level it. Many people think of the desert as an enormous, flat, sandy plain, with here and there an oasis. In reality, the desert is rarely flat. Its surface combines hills and valleys, and generally there is a certain amount of thorny bush scattered about. This bush had to be torn up and thrown on one side before anything else

could be done. Then the men would proceed to fill up the depressions in the ground with sand removed from the higher levels, thus making a reasonably flat surface for the gang that followed close at their heels.

The second gang advanced bearing pieces of stone roughly about twice the size of a man's head. Each man threw down his stone in line as closely as possible with the corresponding stone in the line already laid. Thus, line by line, a solid layer of stone was, as one might say, laid on the face of the desert.

The third gang followed carrying baskets of smaller, harder stones, which they used to fill up the spaces between the big stones already laid. In addition they scattered a thin layer of these small, hard stones over the big ones. When they had passed by, the strip of desert on which we were building the road was entirely covered with stone, in big and small pieces, to a height of ten or twelve inches. The work of the fourth gang was to scatter sand and water over the rough stone surface in preparation for the triumphal progress of the steam-roller. This roller, by its great weight, crushed sand, small stones and big stones into one great, solid mass that lay like a stark, flat wall upon the desert as far as the eye could see.

Now you know the way I built my road. You may know a better way. All I can say is that the

above was *my* way and worked very well. This brings me to Aly. As I said before, I had been telling off the gangs to their different tasks and had given my Greek overseer his final orders; I, myself, would stay with the fourth gang so as to be near the steam-roller.

"Anything else you want to know, George?" I asked.

"No, sir," replied Dimitri Leonidas Constantinopoulos.

"All right. Off you go, then!" I ordered, and turned to mount my horse.

George, as I shall henceforth refer to him, was a little, fat ball of a man, but he climbed with great dignity on to a camel kneeling in readiness for him. The great beast snarled and grunted as it received his weight, but proceeded nevertheless to rise to its feet. George, from his superior height, looked round at his men, counted them to make sure that all were present, and then, sitting up very straight, gave the order to march, in a loud military voice. (I am sure that he firmly believed that he looked like Napoleon at the Pyramids.) The men obediently moved forward and, at that very instant, without any warning whatsoever, the camel dropped on its knees in the first movement a camel makes when it wishes to come to earth. George, who was, of course, quite unprepared for this sudden action, flew over its head, turned a complete somersault

and landed, in a sitting position, with a crash that shook the landscape.

For a moment there was a tense silence and then, as poor George began to feel himself all over with both hands to estimate the damage, a great shout of laughter rose from all the men near by. They all liked George, who was a very decent fellow and good to his men, but he looked so comical sitting there, with all the wind knocked out of him, that it was too much for them. They just stood and rocked. I, personally, was striving desperately to hide a large smile behind my hand when I noted that the camel, evidently thinking that it had done a good day's work, had risen to its feet again and was moving off towards the horizon at a good four miles an hour.

I opened my mouth to shout to some of the men to catch it when I observed a small man, with a monkey-like face and very thin legs, turn his head and look at the camel. Hitherto he had been gazing at the catastrophe with a perfectly solemn expression, but now he quietly trotted after the camel, the cause of all the trouble, seized its head-rope, smacked it vigorously over the muzzle as it snarled at him, and led it back to George, who was, by this time, ready for another start.

There was no further excitement. George was only shaken, and the camel was too wise to attempt to play the same trick twice. Ac-



GEORGE FLEW OVER THE CAMEL'S HEAD

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cordingly, the gangs duly moved off to their work.

The little monkey-faced man stayed with the fourth gang, and I beckoned to him to come to me. I was interested in him. I felt I should like to know something more about the only man in the crowd who had the sense to realise that the camel was running away from camp. You will understand my curiosity when I tell you that, once a camel gets loose in the desert, it is a day's work for scores of men to capture it again. When he stood by my stirrup I said:

"O man, what is your name?"

"Sir," he replied, very seriously, "my name is Aly."

"Well, Aly," I went on, "I noticed that you did not laugh, as the other men did, when the overseer fell off the camel."

"Sir," he said, "why should I laugh? His pride uplifted him and so he fell."

"That may be true," I admitted, "but the other men seemed to think it funny."

"Sir," he replied, "I am not as other men. I am a philosopher."

I nodded my head. "That again may be true," I said, "but I noticed that you were the only man to perceive that the camel was running away. You caught it and brought it back while the other men were still laughing. You are, I think, what I may call a practical philosopher."

"Sir," he agreed, "you say truly that I am very practical."

"Well, Aly," I said, "I want someone who is practical and, at the same time, philosophical, to take command of the steam-roller gang. The raïs of that gang is sick, and will have to go back to his village. Would you like the job? I tell you frankly that you will need all your philosophy in dealing with the steam-roller."

"Sir," he replied, "I have observed that there is a devil in the steam-roller, and I think that you will act wisely in making me raïs of the gang."

"Why?" I asked. "Do you know anything about steam-rollers?"

"Sir," he answered woodenly, "I do not. But I am very practical and, also, I am a great philosopher."

I looked at him keenly, but he was obviously speaking in all seriousness.

"Very well, then," I said, "that is settled. Now we'll go and see what the steam-roller is doing."

I rode off, and he trotted behind me with the same unmoved expression on his face that he had worn throughout the whole of our conversation. Presently we came to the steam-roller, which was surrounded by a group of men. I gave one look at it and groaned aloud. It was off the road again!

I do not suppose that any one of you has ever

had occasion to use a steam-roller in the desert, and I earnestly hope that you never will. It was the one curse of our existence, and yet we could not possibly do without it. I got my first grey hairs in dealing with it, and I have seen strong men, speechless with rage, raising their clenched hands to Heaven, in a mute prayer for patience, as they gazed upon it, one back wheel buried feet deep in the sand at the side and the great front roller sprawling drunkenly over half the road. The engine-driver swore that the thing was bewitched. It may be that the steering-gear was defective in some way. I don't know. Whatever was the cause, this is what usually happened. It would start off, snorting and clanking, and proceed majestically for, say, twenty yards up the road, crushing the stones and making a fine surface as it passed. Then the driver would reverse, and it would roll proudly back again on the same course, thus levelling, well and duly, half the road. Then the other half had to be done. Accordingly the driver would start it off at an angle and advance until the roller was well in the centre of the second half and so begin to crush that.

Naturally, one assumed that the steam-roller would continue to act according to the driver's will. Actually, it would at once proceed to work off the road towards the desert. The driver would tug frenziedly at his steering-gear, and the roller

would plunge straight into the middle of the road. Then he would endeavour to straighten it out again, and one of the back wheels would invariably roll clean off the road into the sand. Then we would all stand round and say what we thought about it in three or four different languages. After that, the only thing to do was to spend an hour or two getting the back wheel on to the road again. It was a gay life for the steam-roller gang!

As soon as Aly and I reached the steam-roller I said to the gang of men who formed its escort, "O men, here is your new raïs."

It was at once clear that my choice was popular, for many of the men smiled, and one said laughingly, "O Aly, now you will teach us philosophy."

"I shall teach you something else," replied Aly grimly, "if you do not obey my orders. What is wrong with this son of a she-camel?" He pointed to the steam-roller as he spoke, and at once ten men hastened to explain.

Aly went and looked at the back wheel that was in the sand. "Lay stones thus and thus," he said, illustrating with flickering hands, "and give the wheel something to travel over."

The men understood at once what he meant, and presently a miniature causeway was built under the offending wheel and towards the main road.

"Now, O driver," commanded Aly, "give steam!"

The driver turned on the steam; men thrust desperately behind the wheel with heavy wooden beams; it gripped the stones and, amidst mighty cheering, the steam-roller took the road again.

"Thus," said Aly, "it should be done," and turned to me for applause.

"Good!" said I. "Very good!"

I knew quite well what would happen, and it did. Intoxicated with the excitement of the moment, the driver got too far on the road before he began to swing the roller straight again. When he realised the danger he brought it round as quickly as he could, but there was not enough width of road for the other back wheel to curve and, while we held our breath in anguish, it rolled sadly off the road into the sand on the other side!

A loud groan went up from the gang; the engine-driver burst into tears, and I gave my opinion of steam-rollers in Arabic, English, French and Hindustani.

The philosopher made no sound whatever, but simply looked at the driver as though he were some strange and noxious insect. Presently he said, addressing no one in particular, "It is in my mind that this man might do better if he were driving a sewing-machine."

Once again, under his direction, the men built

up a causeway for the erring wheel; two stalwarts stood ready behind with the wooden beams, and the rest fell back as Aly commanded, "Give steam!" The driver, with a bitter look at Aly, obediently pulled the lever. Nothing happened. He then pulled everything and twisted everything that he could lay his hands on. Still nothing happened. He turned a panic-stricken face to Aly and said, "O Aly, there is not enough steam."

The steam-roller gang, with one accord, sat down and began to look at the scenery. They had the resigned look of men for whom life could hold no further trials. I, personally, was keeping silent, not for lack of words, but just to see how the philosophy of Aly would stand the strain.

That worthy said nothing but quietly stroked his chin, gazing pensively at the driver the while. Then he remarked coldly, "O man with a mud head, why is there not enough steam?"

The driver burst into a torrent of explanation, from which I gathered that he suspected the gang of removing water from the boiler. Here the gang rose unanimously to its feet and proceeded to assure Aly, individually and collectively, that the engine-driver was the father and mother of all liars. Aly listened impassively and then, turning to the driver, said, "If you do not give steam in ten minutes I will beat you so that your tears will fill the boiler. Even then," he added sourly, "it would be salt water and of little use."

Thereupon he solemnly pulled out a silver watch of enormous size from some mysterious hiding-place in his garments, and marked the time. The engine-driver looked at me for comfort, but in vain. It seemed to me that Aly was dealing with the situation in a highly satisfactory manner.

The next ten minutes were probably the most strenuous in the engine-driver's life. At the end of five, Aly thoughtfully picked up a small iron crowbar and weighed it in one hand with the appearance of a man who has to do a certain job and is wishful to test his tools. The driver, with a look of terror, redoubled his efforts. The gang, thoroughly interested, began to draw nearer, and argue with one another about the driver's prospects of a long life. I kept one eye on Aly and the other on my wrist-watch.

Nine minutes passed, and Aly put down the crowbar in order to roll back his shirt-sleeves. The excitement was now becoming intense. Aly picked up the crowbar again. Nine and a half minutes—and the driver screeched out, "O Aly, there is enough steam!"

A sigh of the purest disappointment went up from the gang; I removed a drop or two of perspiration from my brow, and Aly laid the crowbar on the ground again. "Give steam!" he ordered.

The driver tremblingly pulled the lever, and

the big steam-roller lurched on to the road again.

"Stop!" commanded Aly. The driver obediently stopped, and Aly paced majestically forward to the foot-plate.

"Listen, O man," he said to the thoroughly frightened engine-driver. "I am raïs of this gang. This roller," and he patted the end nearest to him, "will roll *on* the road and will *not* walk about in the desert. If either wheel touches a grain of sand at the side of the road I will beat you till you are sick, and then my gang will beat you till you are well again. Do you understand?"

"O Aly," said the miserable driver, "I understand."

"Very well," said Aly. "Now," with a magnificent gesture, "give steam!"

The roller moved forward, took up its correct direction, proceeded twenty yards, halted, came back to where we were standing and again moved forward, the gang jubilantly preceding it and bestrewing its path with sand and water. It was a beautiful sight!

I turned to Aly very gratefully. That great man was watching the roller with a baleful glare.

"O Aly," I said, "it is in my mind that I have chosen a good raïs."

"Sir," he replied, "I am very practical and also a great philosopher."

"Do all philosophers use an iron crowbar in their philosophy?" I asked, meekly and with a sincere desire to gain information.

"Sir," said Aly, with a wooden face, in which, however, two eyes twinkled merrily, "only the practical ones."

## EPISODE II

## WAR!

I FINISHED building the road described in the last episode and went off on other affairs. So I lost sight of Aly for some time. I used to wonder, at odd moments, what had become of the little man, but presently I had other matters to think about. Various persons in Europe, deciding that the Continent needed a little excitement, proceeded to supply it by introducing the Great War. The result was that several millions of men, including myself, found themselves wearing a very uninteresting kind of dress and doing things that surprised them.

Now, I am a man of peace. It does not amuse me in the least to live in a trench half-full of mud and to be blown up into the air, from time to time, by the bursting of large-sized shells. I cannot take pleasure in being made a target for machine-gun fire, and bayonet-work fills me with the strongest possible loathing. Moreover, it seems to me that there are pleasanter ways of passing the time than sitting in a dug-out, masked like a Burmese tragedian, waiting for the next gas-attack. However, these things had

to be done, and I drew a certain amount of comfort from the fact that the enemy were having the same unhappy experiences. All things considered, then, you will understand my complete satisfaction when, after many vicissitudes, I found myself, one fine day, encamped in the desert again.

Except for the fact that I was in uniform, and that the five hundred men under my orders were called Egyptian Labour Corps or, more familiarly, E.L.C., it was just like old times. I even had George with me. I had met him in Alexandria, and told him that I was going into the desert again, whereupon he immediately declared war on the Central Powers on his own account, joined the E.L.C. in the capacity of foreman and was, at my request, transferred to my section.

We were talking together one evening, after planning out the following day's work, and I was saying how well the men were working. George agreed, but wished that we could get some of the old road-builders back again. That reminded me of Aly, and I asked George if he had seen that philosophical man anywhere. But George could, unfortunately, give me no information.

"None of our men here come from his part of the country," he said, "but we may find someone who knows him this evening. That new

gang is coming up from the base, and the train is due any time now."

"Well," I replied, "we could certainly do with him. He was a first-class raïs."

The conversation shifted back to the work in hand. The troops were moving forward, deeper and deeper into the desert, in pursuit of the retreating enemy, and it was our business to drive the pipe-line after them as fast as we could. Enormous quantities of water were needed for the men and horses engaged, and a great pumping-installation at the base sent the water along the pipe as quickly as we could lay it. Connection between us and the troops was kept up by the Camel Corps, and we all worked very nicely and comfortably together. It made me rub my hands to see the long string of camels set out each morning, each camel carrying its two zinc tanks, one on either side, filled with the water so sorely needed by the hot and weary fighting-men in front. I know what it means to be thirsty, and I was quite determined that no man should suffer from lack of water if I could help it.

"Work hard, O men," I used to say to my E.L.C. rascals, "work hard! Every metre of pipe-line helps to win the victory!"

And they *did* work. Whether it was in actually carrying the lengths of iron pipe and laying them, end to end, on the ground, or in building the narrow-gauge railway-line on which ran the

miniature train that brought up supplies, or in carrying out the various camp duties, it was all the same. They worked magnificently. I very rarely had cause to complain and, even more rarely, reason to punish. I was very well pleased with my men.

It was for this latter reason that I was rather anxious about the new gang arriving that same evening. I hoped they would be of the same type as the men I had already in camp. Where every man was doing his utmost it was essential that there should be no shirkers. I had no desire to spend my valuable time driving men.

I was saying something of the kind to George when he suddenly stood up—we were sitting outside my tent—and looked along the line of rail leading to the base.

"Here comes the train," he said.

"Good!" I returned. "Now we'll walk down to rail-head and see what luck we have."

It was only a short distance, and we had a few minutes to wait before the train drew up alongside us. The trucks were full of men in the familiar E.L.C. uniform, all looking very clean and healthy.

"H'm," I said to George, "they *look* all right, anyway."

I began to move forward to give the necessary orders for detraining, but stopped. A remark-

able thing was happening. The men were all climbing out of the trucks and forming up, two by two, without any trace of bustle or excitement. A little man, carrying a light cane, got out last and ran his eye over the gang. Then he gave a sharp order and the men turned briskly to their right and began to move towards my camp. An incredible thought flashed into my mind. I turned to George and he was staring at the gang with eyes that bulged half-way out of his head.

"George," I whispered, "can it possibly be—that monkey-face—those thin legs—George, it *must* be——"

"ALY!" bellowed George, in a voice of thunder.

The little man halted as though he had been shot and turned towards us. He spoke one word and his men stood still. Another, and they all sat down. Then he walked towards me. At three paces' distance he came to a stop, put his heels together with a click, saluted like a Guardsman and said, in an expressionless voice, "Sir, the steam-roller gang is present."

Out of the tail of my eye I saw George doing a little dance of delight as I returned Aly's salute and said:

"O Aly, have you brought the steam-roller?"

"Sir," he replied, "I have not."

"Then," I announced, with great satisfaction, "we may consider the war as won."

Well, after that, of course, we walked over to the gang, who were obviously bubbling over with excitement, but were held in their places by Aly's iron discipline, and I had to ask and answer ten thousand questions. They were practically all there; even the steam-roller driver, now, for some unearthly reason, acting as cook, had not been forgotten. George had to listen to many sly jokes about the way he fell off the camel, and retaliated by prophesying ferociously about the fate in store for the jokers once he got them to work. Everything was really very pleasant. We marched up to camp, and the various men in the gang quickly dispersed in search of friends and relations once their quarters had been assigned to them. Aly came with me, and I bade him sit down on an empty biscuit-box while I demanded information concerning his activities of the previous two or three years.

He told an astonishing story. It appeared that he had engaged himself with the E.L.C. almost as soon as it was organised. At the end of his three months' service he had re-engaged and then, after a few weeks at home, had joined up once more. He had been at Gallipoli and at Mudros, and had already put in three months in the Canal zone. While in this latter area he had heard, in some mysterious fashion, that I was now with the Corps, and had at once decided to get together the old gang at the first opportunity

and bring them along with him when he once more presented himself for re-engagement. Accordingly, when next he went on leave he set to work. He had had a certain amount of difficulty in tracing various members of the gang; one or two were dead or unfit for service but, in the main, he had been singularly successful. Then he had presented himself at E.L.C. Headquarters with his ready-made gang and had made it a condition of engagement that they should all work with me. Headquarters was only too glad to get such an excellent body of men under the command of a veteran like Aly, and made no difficulties at all. The gang was promptly engaged as a whole, and outfitted immediately. As soon as possible they were despatched to my base, and from thence railed up to me, pursued by the envious glances of various E.L.C. officers who would have dearly loved to steal them.

When I had listened to all this, I said, "O Aly, you have seen and done many wonderful things. Now tell me the most wonderful thing your eyes have beheld during this great war."

"Sir," he replied, "the most wonderful thing I have seen was the foolishness of a man we had as cook at Mudros."

"What makes you remember his foolishness so well?" I asked.

"Sir," said Aly, "my leg."

He pulled back the right leg of his khaki shorts

and displayed his thigh. From hip to just above the knee ran a horrible jagged scar. I recognised the mark at once. There was no mistaking the wound made by a piece of riven metal moving at high speed. I shook my head over it.

"That was a bad wound," I commented. "Piece of shell, eh?"

"Sir," said Aly, "not shell. Bomb!"

"Why," I cried, "did you have enemy 'planes over you at Mudros? How did you come to get bombed?"

"Sir," replied Aly, phlegmatically, "by the foolishness of the cook. Thus it fell out. We were sitting round the fire, some eight or ten of us, one evening, after our meal. The cook came up with something in his hand, crying aloud that he had found a curious thing. He showed it to us and I saw that it was of iron, about the size of a lemon. There was a little ring at the top and a flat finger of iron at the side. Also, the surface of the thing was divided into squares by lines cut deeply into the metal. I had seen such things at Gallipoli—I saw many strange things at Gallipoli—and I said, 'O man, be careful! That is a bomb.'

"He laughed at me, in his foolishness, and said, 'O Aly, you think you know everything.' But the others said to me, 'What is a bomb, Aly?' And I told them. But the cook still mocked at me and said, 'Even if it be so, this bomb is surely

harmless. All the evil has been removed from it; otherwise it would not be here.' I spoke to him very earnestly, for I saw that he was very foolish, and said, 'O man, no bomb is harmless in this war.' Whereupon he laughed loudly and said, 'Well, Aly, let us see.' And so saying, he threw the bomb into the fire!"

"Nonsense, Aly!" I gasped. "Impossible!"

"Sir," said Aly imperturbably, "that is what the cook did. I said he was very foolish."

"Well, go on," I exclaimed. "What happened?"

"Sir," said Aly, "I screamed, like a woman, bidding the men fall on their faces. This they did, being very much afraid, all but the cook. Then there was a great noise and a very bright light and I felt a thousand knives in my leg as I lay. Presently the men who were on the ground got up and came to me. None of them had been hurt, and they put cloths tightly round my leg to stop the blood flowing. Then they bore me to the hospital, and I remained there until my leg became well again."

"You did a very clever thing to call out as you did, Aly. You saved the lives of those men," I said. "But tell me what happened to that fool of a cook?"

"Sir," said Aly, "he went from us."

"I see," I murmured. "You mean he was killed."

"Sir," explained Ally, "he did not lie down.



HE THREW THE BOMB INTO THE FIRE

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So he received much of the force of the explosion. When the men began to pick him up he was dead. Yes," Aly went on, with an air of great contentment, "he was dead, very dead. However," he added, "he was not a good cook and he was very foolish."

"Foolish!" I exclaimed. "Such a man is a standing danger to anyone who comes within a mile of him. I think he is much better dead."

"Sir," said Aly, with his most philosophical look, "it is in my mind that you are right."

## EPISODE III

## FRITZ

ALY and his merry men were a splendid addition to our strength, and the work went on at full speed. My pipe-line seemed to jump forward each day, and the railway-line kept pace with it. Everything was satisfactory, and I should have been perfectly content but for one thing. I had to be constantly on the watch for Fritz. This was the name we had given to a particularly daring enemy airman. The enemy knew, just as well as we did, that our troops could not advance if the water-supply were cut off. Hence it was most important for them to cut it off.

We were, of course, not such fools as to lay the pipe on the surface. It was nicely covered over with sand. The railway-line, too, was cleverly camouflaged so as to be practically invisible from the air. We decorated our tents with bushes and arranged them haphazard instead of in regular lines. Near my tent was a sort of gallows erection to which hung a big brass shell-case with an iron bar hanging near by. The men had strict orders that, whenever they heard the clanging of the shell-case, they must drop anything

and everything, run straight into the desert, scatter, and lie flat.

I had taken every possible precaution to avoid damage from the enemy. But it was obvious, of course, to them that the pipe-line must follow a certain direction, and it was merely a matter of common sense for an airman, noticing any activity along a certain length of line, to deduce the presence of the pipe. Apparently Fritz had been told off to fly over our ground and cut the water-supply. Our own airmen, knowing exactly what Fritz wanted to do, took very great care to prevent him from doing it. But Fritz was really clever, and he managed, now and again, to elude them, and then he made things unpleasant for us.

So, whatever I was doing, I kept a constant watch on one section of the sky, knowing quite well that an ominous black speck might appear at any moment, foretelling death and destruction.

Aly and his gang had been duly informed of our measures for defence against attack from the air, and Aly had nodded his head wisely and said, "Sir, if any man does not understand why we do these things, I will show him my leg."

We had not seen Fritz for a long time, and I was beginning to wonder what had become of him. I hoped, of course, that he had ended his career. I really admired his cleverness and daring, but felt that I could live very happily without

him. The men had ceased to look apprehensively skywards each time they sat in a group, and I had to mention casually, from time to time, that the danger was still there. I banged the shell-case at irregular intervals for practice, and if any man ran into the desert at less than full speed he got a first-class dressing-down. I had an uneasy feeling that things were too good to last. My instinct was correct.

About a week after the arrival of Aly we had a hotter day than usual. The men were very glad to knock off for their midday rest. They ate their meal and sought their tents to enjoy the blessed sensation of a rest in the shade. George and Aly were receiving their instructions from me for the afternoon spell of work. We were standing outside my tent and, as I finished giving my orders, I automatically looked skywards. As I did so I stiffened. Then I jumped clean into the air.

"Fritz!" I yelled.

What I saw was not a speck on the horizon but a black smear as long as a man's hand! Fritz had chosen his time well and, but for my lucky glance skyward, would have been upon us without warning. My yell made George look upwards. Instinctively the two of us plunged forward towards the brass alarm. George stumbled, caught his foot in a tent-rope and fell full-length. I fell over him, and there we both were with our

mouths full of sand, each trying to roll clear of the other and both getting mixed up with the tent-rope. He was spluttering strange Greek oaths, and I was cursing him in every one of the languages I knew. As I struggled frantically to my knees there came to me the blessed sound of a brazen clamour fit to split the sky. I cleared my eyes of sand and looked towards the alarm. Aly, calm, cool, detached, was beating it with the iron bar. From every tent men were streaming, in all stages of undress, desertwards. In half a minute we three were the only souls in camp. The desert was apparently dotted with curiously rounded lumps of stone and a great silence reigned. Aly was sitting comfortably by the alarm; George was lying placidly where he had fallen, and I was kneeling in an attitude of prayer. I looked upwards and saw the 'plane get bigger and bigger. Soon I was able to distinguish the Iron Cross. Then I waited for the bang, and wondered whether I should be alive in another five minutes. Almost at once, Bang! Bang! Bang!

Fritz had found us, sure enough.

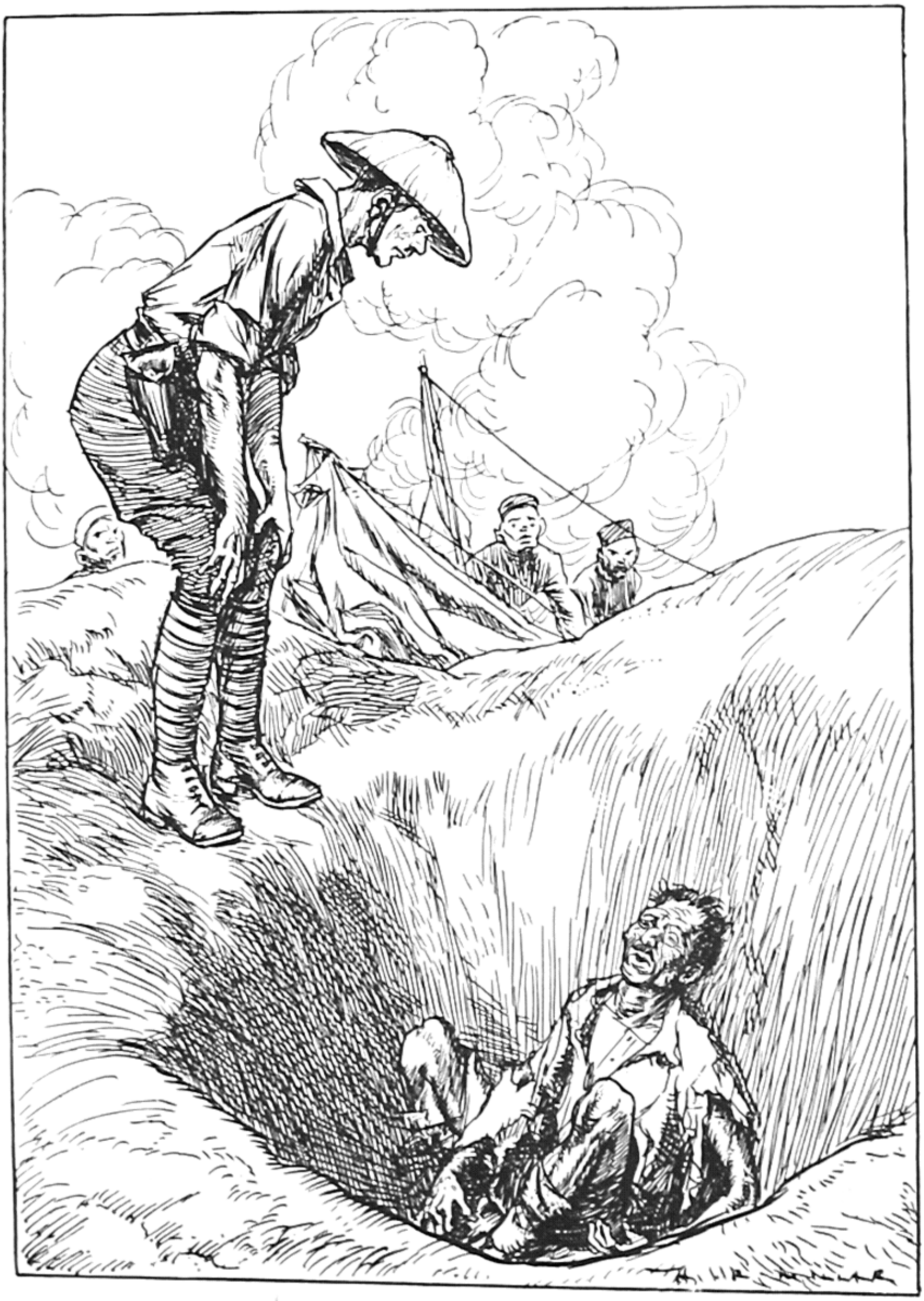
I saw one tent collapse like a house of cards, then blaze up again in a pillar of flame. The railway-line leapt into the air in another place, and the third bomb seemed, to my excited imagination, to drop clean on the alarm-post. I lifted my gaze again. Thank God! Fritz had

done his day's work and was rapidly becoming an unpleasant memory. I got to my feet and made my way heavily to the alarm-post. I was quite sure that Aly was killed and I felt a dull rage against Fritz. The sand began to settle and the smoke to clear away. I could not see any alarm-post at all. There was a hole in the ground and the sand was slowly trickling down the sides. Ah! there was the alarm-post lying on the ground, in three pieces. I could see the shell-case half buried in the sand about ten yards farther on. I approached the hole and, summoning all my courage, looked in.

Then I burst into a shout of laughter. The hole was about six feet deep and, seated at the bottom, thoughtfully regarding the one remaining half of his shirt, was my dear old philosopher, Aly, alive and unhurt. At the noise I made he looked up. He must have seen the glad relief in my face, for a pleased expression lifted the corners of his mouth for an instant. Then he looked at me in his usual wooden way and said:

"Sir, I am in, but how shall I get out?"

I rapidly took off one of my puttees and threw down one end of the coarse, strong material. Aly seized it and, in a moment, was standing by my side. I gripped him by the hand and shook it warmly. I did not say anything, but I know he understood. He had escaped by a miracle. As the bomb dropped he had thrown himself



"SIR, I AM IN, BUT HOW SHALL I GET OUT?"

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absolutely flat. The alarm-post went flying, of course; the force of the explosion had practically torn the loose shirt off Aly's back, and created a veritable crater in the sand, down one slope of which he had rolled before he could stop himself. He explained this in a few words, and I told him to sit down while I recalled the men. I walked over to the half-buried shell-case, picked it up and banged it heartily with the iron bar that still hung to one portion of the alarm-post. As I did so I noticed that there were several new holes in the shell-case, and reflected that, but for his presence of mind, those holes might have been in Aly.

The men began to plunge back through the sand, and groups speedily formed along the railway-line and round the now smouldering tent. I observed that George was examining the remains of the latter and, obviously, giving some directions to the men as they drifted back. I walked back towards Aly to see if he were quite all right. As I approached, I observed that he was busy with his right leg. The thought flashed into my mind that he *had* been hurt after all and was quietly bandaging the wound. I need not have worried! The little man was placidly engaged in trying on my puttee and admiring the effect! He rose to his feet as I came up, and I must admit that the puttee on the one leg produced an uncommonly good impression. It changed

what was, in effect, a leg like a hen's into a truly noble limb. I said so in so many words.

"Sir," said Aly, "it undoubtedly has a pleasing appearance."

"So it has," I agreed, "and the other one shall keep it company." I quickly unwrapped the other puttee and handed it to him. He accepted it with a salute, and gravely proceeded to put it on. When he had got it to his liking, and patted it here and there to make sure that it produced exactly the same picture as the other, he stood erect for my inspection.

"Excellent!" said I. "O Aly, the puttees are my gift to remind you of this day. You have acted well and bravely," and I patted him on his bare shoulder.

"Sir," he said, saluting, "a new shirt would also help to remind me."

"O Aly," I replied, laughing, "you speak truly. A new shirt you shall have, and it shall be of silk, khaki in colour, with your name cunningly embroidered on the pocket. I myself will pay for it, for it is in my mind that you have saved the lives of many men this day."

Aly again saluted and said, "Their lives were on the finger of God and He graciously forbore to shake His finger."

I rubbed my chin. This was getting a bit beyond me. "All right," I said, "but the men will think as I do."

We walked over to my tent and I put on another pair of puttees. Then we proceeded to the scene of the fire. Under George's direction the occupants had salvaged what remained, and were simply dancing with rage as they surveyed the ruins of their cherished belongings.

One man held what had once been a blanket aloft, and called upon all devils to smite the criminal who had done this thing. Another literally foamed at the mouth as he disinterred a warped and charred boot, the only remains of what he described as boots fit for the Khalifah himself. I endeavoured to soothe their feelings by pointing out that all these things should be replaced, but in vain. Each man regarded it as a personal insult that *his* possessions should have been attacked, and the threats that flew into the air after the vanished airman were enough to chill the blood of a rhinoceros. In the midst of the excitement a voice suddenly bellowed out, "O men of little thought, do you forget that, but for the action of Aly, you would now be as are your possessions?"

I turned in surprise. It was George who was making the speech. He seemed strangely moved. He went on, "You, O Ahmad"—this to the man holding the blanket—"but for Aly, *you* would be holed like your blanket. You, O Muhammad"—this to the man still moaning over his boots—"but for Aly, *you* would be burnt and twisted like your boots."

He swung round to Aly. "O Aly, you have saved our lives! I, Dimitri Leonidas Constantinopoulos, salute you!" And the little fat ball of a man stood stark and stiff at the salute.

I will not be sure, but I really think that Aly blushed. However, he had not much time to do anything, for the men, quick to perceive the truth of George's words, surged round him in a mass which constantly increased as the laggards came up. I fell back, with George at my side, and watched amusedly. I reckoned that Aly was going to be the centre of a demonstration in force. It was so. In another minute I heard a stentorian voice, "Up with him! Up with Aly, our father! Up with Aly who has saved our lives!"

Two burly labourers seized the wretched man and, with a heave, he was on their shoulders. Automatically a procession was formed and proceeded to make the circuit of the camp. To the accompaniment of loud clapping of hands and the singing of scandalous verses, made up on the spur of the moment, the hero of the hour was carried along in triumph, men struggling for the honour of bearing his weight.

When they passed my tent I took care to be standing outside, with George near by, and I shall never forget the look of unfathomable misery on Aly's face as the procession cheered when George and I solemnly saluted him. He looked like a man who dearly wishes to be dead.

But you should have seen him a week or two later, in the full glory of silk shirt and puttees! I was glad we were in the desert. An ordinary town would not have been big enough for him.

## EPISODE IV

## THE SERGEANT

AFTER the events described in the previous episode the very first thing we did was to repair our railway-line. This funny little narrow-gauge line was of the utmost importance to us. Not only did the trains that ran over it bring up the sections of pipe-line that were so important but they also carried the rails on which they ran. When I say rails I do not mean single rails, such as one sees employed in the building of an ordinary railway or tram-line, but rather the lengths of double rails such as one gets for a toy engine and then fits together in a wide circle to make a track for it to run on. These lengths of rail were laid, end to end, on the sand and then bolted together. In this way a railway-line could be laid down very rapidly—in fact as rapidly as the men could place the lengths in position.

Of course such lengths of rail were very heavy and very awkward to handle. A train would arrive, its trucks piled high with pieces of the track on which it was to run, and it was a very uncomfortable and dangerous bit of work to get them from the trucks to the ground with-

out sending the whole load crashing to earth at once.

Now, Aly and his men had raised the handling of these rails to the level of a fine art, and it was a pure pleasure to watch them dealing with the heavy, ungainly masses of metal. They had their own way of doing things—noisy, but astonishingly effective. One lot of men on the truck would lift a section of rail, pass it sideways and downwards to another lot on the ground, who would receive it with uplifted hands, swing outwards with it and so hand it to a third lot of men, who would proceed to lay it carefully on the pile that had preceded it. Every man knew his place and his work, and a train would be unloaded in an unbelievably short space of time. Aly himself would be here, there and everywhere, now on the trucks, superintending the lifting of an awkwardly-placed length of rail, now on the ground, watching that each length was properly stacked, emitting a brief word of command or exhortation from time to time, and always calm and unhurried.

One evening we were just cleaning up after the day's work, prior to moving off to camp. The day had been hot and the work arduous, and everybody, myself included, was glad that it was over. Presently Aly blew his whistle and the tired men lined up in pairs ready to march back to camp. Aly came up to me to report all

ready and I was opening my mouth to give the word to march when I heard him grunt in a very disgusted way. He pointed down the line and I said, "O Lord!" as I saw the train steaming into view. I knew what that meant. *Another* lot of rails to be unloaded. Well, it *had* to be done. And we were *very* tired.

I bade the men sit down. Then I made a short speech. I told them that they had worked well and that I knew they were tired. But now there was more work to do. *And it must be done!* But extra work deserved extra pay. Therefore that same evening each man would get extra rations. Every face brightened up at this. Moreover, I went on, there would be an hour's extra sleep the next morning. At this, the look of fatigue disappeared entirely from the gang. "Now," I concluded, "every man will sit still and rest until the train comes in. Then I shall give the order and I think, yes, I think, those rails will be unloaded very quickly." There was a deep growl of approval from the men.

I sat down and Aly solemnly squatted by my side. We all watched the approaching train much as a pack of wolves watches an unsuspecting deer. It was our meat, so to speak. The train was slowing up now. I noticed vaguely that on one truck there were some soldiers sitting on the rails, six or eight of them, I think. There was a deep silence.

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BEHIND HIM CAME A MASS OF EXCITED MEN

"Get ready, O men!" I muttered. I felt Aly stiffen at my side. He said nothing, but I was dead certain that, at all costs, he would be the first man to reach that train. The train stopped. "Go!" I thundered, jumping to my feet.

Aly sprang clean into the air and raced towards the train like a greyhound. Tearing behind him came a mass of excited men, every one of whom was determined to be before everyone else. In an instant the trucks were covered with swarming khaki figures and I saw lengths of rail rising into the air from every truck. The soldiers had disappeared from view entirely, swallowed up.

I moved a little nearer. Every man was in his place, and the work was proceeding with machine-like precision and at a speed that was astonishing.

Presently I heard a voice. "Excuse me, sir, but is this an enemy attack?" I turned round and saw a burly R.E. sergeant, with six grinning men behind him.

"Oh no, sergeant," I laughed, "we are rather anxious to get that train unloaded as quickly as possible."

"But," he protested, "a little feller with puttees on put his foot on my face." The grin on the faces of the men behind him deepened. They were enjoying it.

"Ah," said I, "that would be Aly. Don't be annoyed, sergeant. Be thankful he had no spurs

on! Take it from me, he would have walked over *my* face in just the same way if I had been in his path."

The sergeant chuckled. "Seems a good sort of feller, sir."

"One of the best," I said, "and his men are just as good," and, in a few words, I explained the situation.

The sergeant was deeply interested. "And they've been working all day!" he said.

"That's right," I replied, "and jolly hard work too."

"Ho," he said. "Then this is where we come in. We'll show your Aly something. I'll learn him to tread on my face. Come on, men!"

He turned and ran back to the train, followed by his men, who scented a joke. I walked forward in time to see him reach a truck on which Aly was perched, exhorting a group of men, in hot and lurid words, to seize the accursed rails and hurl them from them.

"Hi, Johnny!" he bellowed, making a megaphone of his hands. "Hop off that truck, you and your perishing men, and stand by to receive rails!"

Aly smiled his twisted smile. He understood quite well what the sergeant meant, and his men shouted excitedly as they fell off the truck, shouldering the men on the ground out of the way. In a second the sergeant and his men were in their places and handling the first section of

rail in a way that showed they had nothing to learn from Aly or anyone else.

"Ho!" said the sergeant, as the rail swung up and out.

"Ha!" grunted Aly, as it was received and passed behind.

"Again!" shouted the sergeant as the next rail rose in the air.

"Hi!" shrieked Aly, as it was captured by the straining men below.

I looked on admiringly. The men on the other trucks did their best to keep pace with the experts and toiled like madmen. In an impossibly short space of time the train was cleared.

The sergeant and his men, all very red in the face, descended, and I shook hands with them all, thanking them for their sporting action.

"That's all right, sir," puffed the sergeant. "Always glad to help good men." His men nodded approval. Aly came forward and the sergeant seized him in a grip of iron.

"Look here, you," he said. "Next time you tread on my face I'll bend one of your own rails round you," and he shook him warmly by the hand.

Aly turned to me woodenly and said, "Sir, please tell the English soldier that I, Aly, think he is a good man."

I translated, and the sergeant replied, "Then you tell him from me, sir, that I think there are

two of us." And once again he shook hands with the little raïs.

We all went back to camp together, very tired, but very happy. And, after I had whispered in the sergeant's ear a sentence or two in which the mysterious word "canteen" figured, the soldiers were smiling as pleasantly as everybody else.

## EPISODE V

## THE CATASTROPHE

ONE morning we had a visit from a Great One. He arrived about 8 A.M., accompanied by various attendant officers, and made a thorough inspection. He poked about the camp and admired the Christmas-tree effect presented by the tents, as well as the jig-saw pattern on which they were pitched. He saw the various gangs at work, and was particularly pleased with one little exhibition staged by George. That worthy took along fifty men and halted them near a large wooden shed. On the word, they ran forward and posted themselves at various points round it. Then George blew his whistle. The men bent their backs and then slowly straightened up again. As they did so, lo! the shed rose into the air! Another blast of the whistle and the men gravely walked forward, bearing the shed with them, to a point indicated by their proud commander. "Tweet!" went the whistle. Down went the shed, and each man stood awaiting further orders. A final chirrup, and the men ran together, fell into two lines, and stood easy. It was very nicely done, and the Great One said so. George swelled with

pride to such an alarming extent that I trembled for his waist-belt.

Aly and his gang were the next to be visited, and I brought forward the little man and presented him. The Great One's eye was at once caught by the unwonted sight of the embroidered silk shirt and the puttees, and he began to ask questions. So I told him the story of how Aly had won them. The Great One listened attentively and, at the end, congratulated Aly on his presence of mind and shook hands with him. He then said something in a low tone to one of the officers standing by, who made a note in a little book.

Then he had a look at the pipe-line, glanced at our comic railway, and finally departed after a few kind remarks to me.

After he had gone, I said to Aly, "O Aly, you saw that the officer wrote your name in his little book. Surely some great reward will now come to you."

"Sir," said Aly, "I think they will make me a captain. But I do not care. They may make me a general if they like."

I do not know whether Aly was ever recommended for the position of general or not, because that same afternoon I got news that drove everything else out of my head. At 4 P.M. an orderly brought me a message that I was wanted at H.Q. at once. I did not lose any time in getting

there, and found the place seething with excitement.

"O.C. wants to see you, old man," said a brother officer. "We're moving out on the jump. What a life!"

I grinned sympathetically and hurried to the H.Q. tent. The O.C. troops began at once. "Ah, there you are! I've just had a message that the enemy are trying to turn our flank out yonder," and he pointed N.E. "My orders are to move out in force and stop 'em. We ride in two hours. I want *all* the ammunition and water for three days loaded up. There are 300 camels, Indian Camel Transport, available. Can your men do it in the time?"

"Are the camels ready to march, sir?" I asked.

"They're coming in to be loaded now," he replied.

I made a swift calculation: 300 camels, two hours, the men I had at hand.

"We'll do it, sir," I said.

"Good man!" he cried. "Off you go, then."

I saluted and tore back to camp.

In five minutes every available man was hurrying towards the water-troughs. When I got there I looked at the scene in amazement. Camels were here, there and everywhere. The earth seemed covered with camels. In ten seconds the Camel Officer and I had formed our plan of action. He began to talk in rapid Hindustani to his Indian

section-leaders, and I seized upon George and Aly.

"George," I said, "take two gangs and load up those camels with cases of small-arms ammunition. Those over there are to be loaded with shell. Tell the men that, if they drop anything, they will all be blown to small pieces and will never know what hit them. Aly, take all the remaining men and load up that bunch of camels with water. Tell off men to fill the water-tanks, and others to hitch them into position. As soon as a camel is loaded, get it moving so as to be out of the way. Step lively, now!"

George and Aly moved off at a rapid pace. I took up my position on a bit of high ground from which I could command a view of the proceedings.

At the very outset it was clear that the Indian camel-drivers were useless for this particular job.

My men unceremoniously shoved them out of the way, took charge of their camels, dealt faithfully with them, and finally thrust the head-ropes into the hands of the bewildered Indians with fierce injunctions to get out of it. George, with his helmet cocked truculently on one side, was vehemently superintending the packing of something-inch shell on one group of camels. His men were handling the live shell as casually as though they were melons. Some little way off,

a raïs was in charge of another band of desperadoes who were slamming cases of cartridges on to the camels as fast as they could lift them from the ground.

Away by the water-troughs Aly was enjoying himself hugely. Perched precariously astride one trough, he was directing personally the filling of every individual tank. Having, apparently, eyes in the back of his head, he was at the same time urging the men who were hitching on the tanks to see that every one was well and truly fastened on. A camel broke loose and began to mix up things. In a trice, Aly was clinging to its head-rope and forcing it to its knees again. The work proceeded at tremendous speed. Camel after camel was loaded up, arose and moved off, making place for the next. Some distance off, the Camel Officer was marshalling the loaded camels, and presently I saw them string out and move forward towards the horizon.

I sent a shout of encouragement to my men. "O men, they are moving!" A yell of enthusiasm came back from the toiling, perspiring gangs. Every man redoubled his efforts. The noise was deafening. Men were shouting; camels were bubbling and snarling; there was the squeak and whine of leather pack-straps, viciously pulled taut, the clank of metal, the hissing rush of water in the tanks, and, high above all, the voice of Aly as he urged on his men. Most of the

camels had been dealt with, and I was shouting some order or other when I heard a mighty sound of trampling hoofs.

I turned, and my pulses quickened at what I saw. The Brigade was moving out! Two thousand of the finest cavalry the world has ever seen!

They came on at a quick walk, the horses rearing and dancing in the excitement of the moment. The tanned faces that showed under the slouch hats were of a healthy bronze; the eyes that glinted here and there were steely grey; the bodies that swayed so easily to the movements of the frantic horses were wire and whipcord. Tunics had been almost completely abandoned, and the horsemen had their equipment buckled on over their shirts or even over simple cotton vests. Such an outfit would not have passed muster at a review but, my word! it looked very well in the desert.

On they came, heading straight for us. In an instant, in some mysterious fashion, a broad path was made for them; camels were pulled out of the way; bales, boxes, tanks hurled here and there so that the fighting-men might have a clear road. Another moment and they were on us!

I had a swift vision of wild eyes and tossing manes as the first squadron pranced forward and then—well, then I remembered that I also

had been a cavalryman once, and I tore off my helmet and waved it in the air. "Go it, the Corn-stalks!" I yelled.

"Bully for you!" shouted a lanky Light Horse-man. Then remarks began to fly like hail. My men had automatically stopped work—indeed, to continue was impossible—and were crowding forward to cheer the oncoming host.

"O brother with the long legs," shouted a laughing E.L.C. man, "take care that your horse does not run away from under you!" This in Arabic, but the long-legged trooper seemed to understand, for he shouted, "Hi, Johnny, watch out for my long legs when I come back!"

Again, "Have you no coat, brother, that you ride in your shirt?"

And again, "Is your horse a man that he walks on two legs?"

The horsemen were in no way behind in the war of chaff. They picked out men here and there whom they recognised, and hurled winged remarks at them in blunt, soldier terms. The delighted E.L.C. men promptly retorted with good, broad specimens of fellah humour. Aly and his men came in for a large amount of re-cognition, and I must say that they gave as good as they took. Aly was superb. In cold, emotion-less speech he said just what occurred to him, and the gang roared its applause.

The column moved along, jingling, creaking

and snorting, amidst a whirl of sand and excitement, and the last squadron was actually riding by when the dreadful catastrophe occurred that ruined Aly's reputation as a philosopher for ever. As I said before, the little man was perched on a water-trough, and his commanding position drew the attention of the troopers to him particularly; many were the remarks addressed to his quaint personality. Nothing could have pleased him better. He gave back jest for jest, laugh for laugh. Sarcasm flowed from him in a steady stream. His wooden expression of countenance doubled the effect of his acid comments, and the men of his gang were almost beside themselves with pride and joy. Aly was indeed a leader after their own hearts.

As the last squadron began to ride by, Aly gathered up his forces for one final outburst. A trooper with a merry eye waved a cheerful hand to the little man and shouted, "How much for the puttees, Johnny?"

That was exactly the chance Aly wanted. He cast a cold, disparaging eye over the speaker and drew a deep breath. The gang waited in the silence of expectation. They felt in their bones that their leader was now going to make a few remarks that would surpass anything they had ever heard before. The squadron jingled along chuckling. Aly bent forward, thrust out an accusing finger at the cheerful one, and commenced

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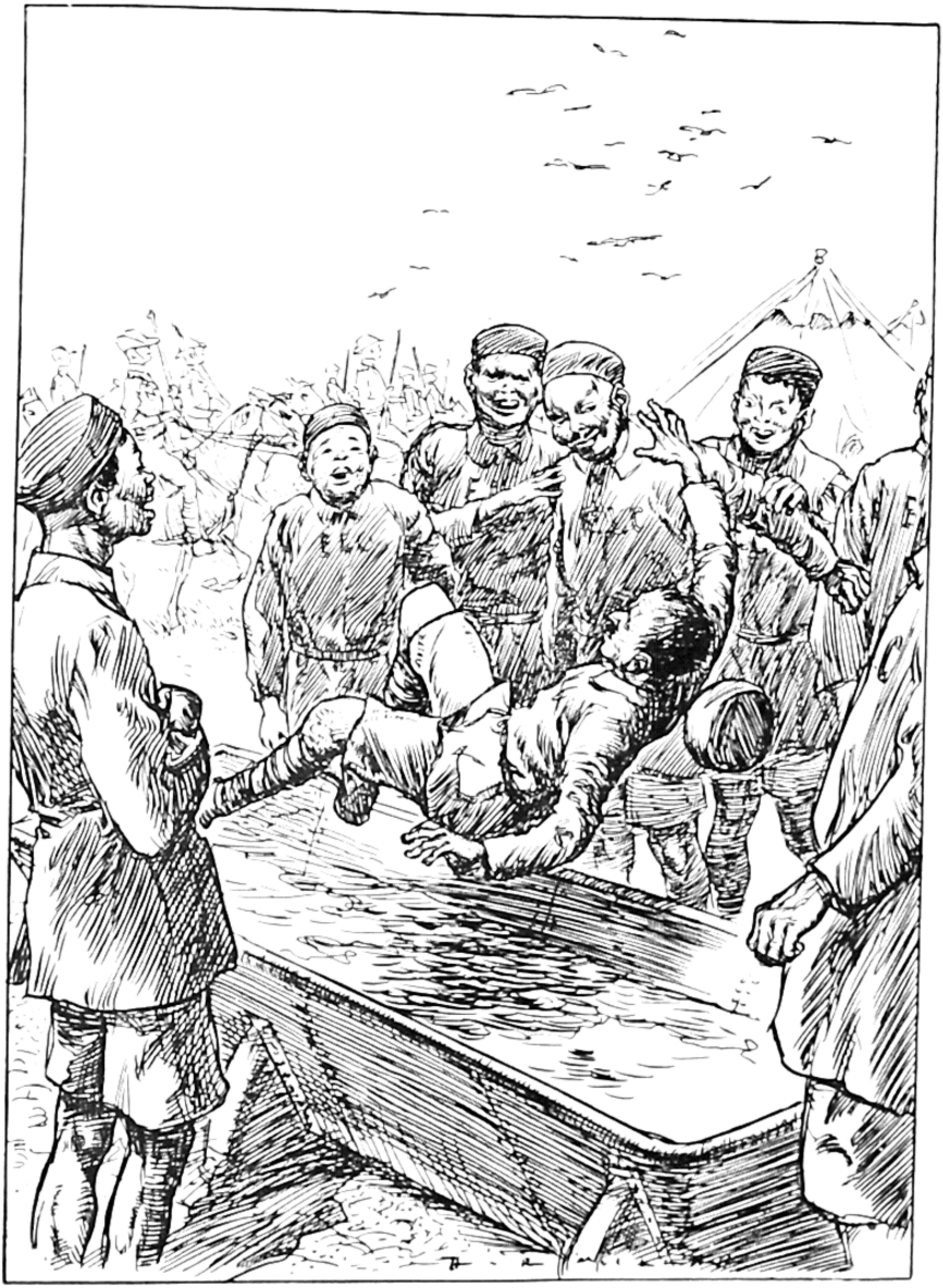
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HE FELL HEADLONG INTO THE WATER

grandiloquently, "O giraffe, dressed up as a soldier! O father of asses riding on a mule's back——"

And then, at that very instant, Fate smote poor Aly. His foot slipped and, waving his arms wildly in the air, with a mighty splash, he fell headlong into the water. In his own words, Pride had uplifted him and so he fell! There was a thunder of laughter from the troopers. The gang stood petrified with horror. I stopped breathing altogether, wondering what next would befall. In a second, Aly had bounded to his feet and, dripping and spluttering, began once more to declaim.

The troopers literally rocked in their saddles with laughter. The more he talked the more they laughed. His finest shafts of wit, his real pearls of sarcasm, were useless, coming from such a comical little figure. The men of his gang made superhuman efforts not to laugh, and the last sections of the Brigade rode by wiping their streaming eyes. The very last horseman added insult to injury by blowing an airy kiss to the victim of the disaster!

Aly's face was a picture. He looked at the expressionless faces of his men; he looked at me —I was busy admiring the desert—and then he looked at the water-trough. At that moment he seemed to lose his head altogether. He addressed that unfortunate receptacle for water in words

that were hot enough to set it on fire. He accused it of being made from dead men's coffins, and painted an awful picture of the uses to which it would be put in the Hereafter. As he talked he seemed to get more and more angry. He shook his fists in the air; he danced up and down in the water until he reminded me of a school of porpoises at play. His face was ashy-grey with rage and twisted with fury. His philosophy, alas! had deserted him entirely, and he was just primitive man inveighing bitterly against the injustice of Providence.

Little by little his passion wore itself out. He sat down on the edge of the trough and scowled bitterly at the backs of the disappearing horsemen. Then he turned morosely to his gang and said, "Let us continue to fill the tanks for these mockers of good men."

The men, in a sympathetic silence, recommenced their toil.

I crept softly away. I went to where the last remaining cases of cartridges and shell were being loaded up. I felt it would be safer there!

As I stole over the sand I looked back, and saw Aly still sitting on the edge of the trough, with his feet in the water, brooding over what might have been. I hastily averted my eyes. The sight of a strong man in his agony has always been too much for me!

# "SPOTS"

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Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

# "SPOTS"

## I

THE sun was well above the horizon, and its rays shone directly on a bare patch of ground in the jungle. In the centre of this bare spot was something that looked like a large stone. But it was not a large stone; it was Spots, the leopard.

Spots lay quite still, and allowed the sun to blaze down upon the whole length of his back. He grumbled to himself, for he was in a bad temper. He ought to have been happily asleep long ago, but he was hungry, and a hungry leopard finds it almost impossible to sleep. He knew that it would be useless to look for food while the sun shone, and so he lay and muttered and growled and wished that night would come. Presently he rose to his feet and prowled restlessly about the clearing for a moment before settling down again to wait.

As he moved, you might have noticed one or two rather curious things about him. For example, his coat looked worn in places—like a rug that has been too long in use—and here and there the fur had quite gone. He opened his mouth in a mighty yawn, and his teeth showed

yellow and too near the gums. He put his feet down carefully as though the pads hurt him; his claws did not grip and hold as they would have done if they had been properly sharp. He moved rather stiffly, and not quite so close to the ground as a leopard should do.

The fact was that Spots was old. Now, old age, to a wild animal, and especially to a beast of prey, like Spots, is a terrible thing. It always means starvation and, very often, a shameful death. It brings with it weakness and, in Nature, weakness can expect no mercy. Only the strong can hope to survive. Little by little, age had laid a heavy hand on Spots. He had ceased to be able to attack the deer that were such an easy prey when he was young. They moved too quickly for him now. He would look longingly at a young wild boar, but the thought of the gleaming tusks of the leader of the herd held him back. Even the cattle, grazing near the villages in his district, were a difficult problem. Their great horns were a perpetual menace.

Thus Spots, driven by Fate, had reached the lowest depths. In order that he might live, he found himself compelled to hunt the weakest animal of all. In other words, Spots had become a man-eater. It was now his custom to lie hidden near the grazing-grounds; to crouch in the bushes near the streams from which the women of the villages drew their water; to flatten him-

self out in the long jungle grass that lined the forest paths. There he would wait patiently until some unhappy woman or child came near enough for him to spring.

Then there would be a shrill scream of terror, followed by a silence only broken by the horrible sound of Spots eating.

Now, it is quite an easy matter for a leopard to kill women, children and even men, but—he must not do it twice near the same village, if he wishes to keep alive. In some mysterious way Spots had realised this, and so he never stayed long after his kill and never went back to it. When he was full-fed he would travel quite a long distance before he lay up for the day. The next time he killed, it would be from ten to fifteen miles away. It was because of this cleverness of his that Spots had lived so long. When the men of the village arrived at the scene of the killing, Spots was far away, having left no tracks. The matter would be reported by the Headman of the village and there it would, apparently, end. But it did *not* end there, and Spots, all unknown to himself, had become famous.

Forest-rangers began to talk about Spots. Some of them made efforts to find him, but in vain. His habit of never going back to a village where he had once killed made it very difficult to know where he was. The Forest Officer began to take an interest in Spots; he made enquiries

but, while there was plenty of information about the various people killed, he could learn nothing that would help him to track the murderer down.

He issued official warnings to the various villages in the district and offered a reward for Spots, alive or dead.

Spots continued to kill.

Tricks of all kinds were tried; traps were cunningly laid. Spots avoided and escaped them all.

The reward was increased until it reached the sum of five hundred rupees.

It was said that Spots had been responsible for more than a score of deaths!

Spots knew nothing about official warnings or rewards, but he did know that it was becoming very difficult to find food. Children no longer ran about the villages at dusk. The women drew their water early, and men went through the jungle in couples and armed with heavy sticks. Spots had visited a village the previous night and had waited, cunningly hidden, near the gates of the rough stockade surrounding it, for hours. He had gained nothing for his trouble, and had departed in some haste at daybreak when he heard and saw the cattle being driven out to feed. But the cattle had detected his presence, and the leader of the herd had charged after him for fifty yards or so, snorting with fury.

Spots, being in a hurry, could not be so careful

as usual, and a boy, running after the great bull that had charged, noticed tracks that told him their own story. He ran back to the village and told the Headman what he had seen.

It was unfortunate for Spots that he did not realise that little boys have sharp eyes. He had made up his mind to return to the village and try again. Why did he break the rule which had kept him safe so long? Was it the smell of the herd coming out to feed? Was it because he had not actually killed? Was it the shame he felt at being chased by an animal whose neck he could have broken with one stroke of his paw in the days when he was young? We shall never know. Wild animals, like men, do foolish things at times.

Whatever the reason, Spots set out once again for the village, on the evening of this same day, quite determined to obtain food, no matter what risks he ran. His eyes shone as he slank through the undergrowth; from time to time he uttered the hoarse cough that tells all the neighbourhood that a leopard is hungry and does not care who knows it. So Spots went out to his last kill.

## II

The Forest Officer sat at a table and looked at a map which he had drawn. As he did so he frowned, for it was a map of the district of which

he was in charge, and on it there were many red crosses. Each cross denoted a death and, in every case, the murderer was Spots.

From time to time the officer looked in a little book; each time he did so he drew a pencil-line from one cross to another.

He sat scowling at the map for some time after he had drawn the last pencil-line, and then his face cleared. He nodded his head as though in answer to an unspoken question. Then he smiled and said, "I think we shall get you this time, my friend." He looked at his watch; it was about seven o'clock. He clapped his hands and to the servant who appeared he said, "Tell Badri to come here, please."

In a moment or two a small brown-faced youth, of about eighteen years of age, passed silently into the room, saluted and stood awaiting orders. He had curiously bright eyes and stood perfectly still. He was the Forest Officer's gun-bearer and tracker, and was famous throughout the Province for his wonderful powers of sight.

"O Badri," said the Officer, "we go once more in search of the spotted one, and it is in my mind that this day he dies."

Badri looked politely doubtful and said, "We have sought for him many times, Sahib."

"That is true," said the Forest Officer, "but we have sought blindly. Now, for many days

the people of the villages have brought me news. All this have I written. Also, here is a picture that I have drawn. Now I tell you that this picture shows to me every village where the spotted one has killed."

Badri's face showed that he did not as yet understand. "Also," continued the Officer, speaking more emphatically, "my picture tells me this. The spotted one moves from East to West and from West to East only. If he kills in the East, then goes he to the West for his next kill. If he kills in the West, then goes he East."

Badri's eyes flashed.

"His last kill was in the East, Sahib," he said. The Forest Officer thumped the table with his fist.

"Therefore, this night or next he kills in the West!" he cried.

"There be four villages to the West," said Badri thoughtfully.

"And," finished the Officer, "he has already killed in three of them. So says my picture. And he never kills twice in the same village!" Badri nodded.

"Then shall we await him in the fourth," said he, and saluted. "I go to clean the rifle."

Two minutes later the Forest Officer was filling his pockets with cartridges, and Badri was busy with an oily rag.

## III

It was late afternoon and the people of the village were already making their preparations for the night. The cattle were coming in, herded by the children, and the women were busy about the fires making the evening meal. The men had returned from their labour earlier than usual and were gathered round the Headman, who was looking very important.

From the jungle near by a goat bleated. The sound came from that part where three trees stood together. In one of the trees there was something like a large birds' nest. It was at the foot of this tree that the goat was tied.

Entirely concealed by the leaves and branches that formed the nest sat the Forest Officer and his native tracker, Badri. The nest had been quickly built by the men of the village that same day, and the Forest Officer and Badri had taken their places in it two hours previously. They sat perfectly still, their feet crossed and their knees apart. The muzzle of the Forest Officer's double-barrelled gun poked out amongst the leaves. A rifle lay where it could easily be snatched up in case of need. Badri's eyes examined every bush and every tuft of grass near by. The goat continued to bleat.

The sun was very near the horizon when Badri, whose hand was resting on the Forest Officer's

knee, pressed gently and extended one finger so that it pointed to a certain bush. The Forest Officer's eye followed the pointing finger. At first he saw nothing, but presently at one point he detected a slight difference in colour among the leaves of the bush. As Badri turned his head slowly to him he nodded gently as a sign that he had seen.

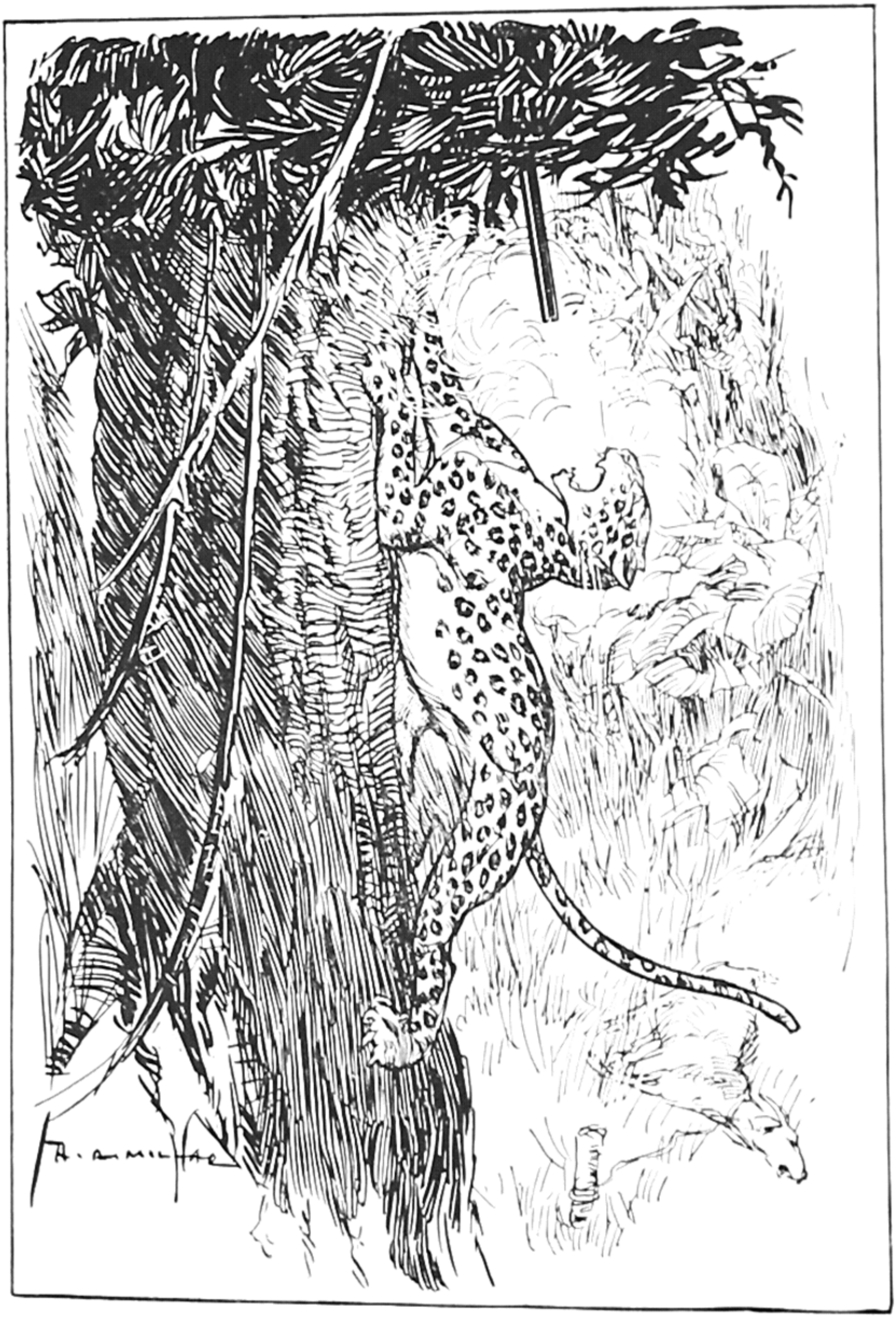
Spots was crouched beneath the bush and he was watching the nest. Every sense he possessed told him that there was something wrong about it. He had been uneasy ever since he had passed the place where he had lain the night before. He had there detected a new scent, a scent different from that of the brown men. He did not know that the Headman had taken the Forest Officer and shown him the tracks discovered by the little boy, and that the Forest Officer, in his delight at finding his ideas confirmed, had rewarded the small boy with a whole rupee. Spots kept his eyes fixed on the nest. Nothing moved and there was no scent. The air was still, and the only sound was the desperate bleating of the goat.

Spots was getting more hungry every minute, and the goat represented what he most desired in life at that moment—food. If only that nest were not there! His caution was fighting a losing battle with his hunger when the goat suddenly strained at the cord that fastened it to the tree.

That movement decided Spots. He could not bear the idea of his prey escaping; he became furious at the thought. He crouched yet lower and silently sprang. His teeth flashed dully as he buried them in the goat's throat. The goat sank to the earth, dying. Spots bounded away and waited, his tail lashing his sides. Nothing happened! Reassured, he slowly returned and sank down to eat and drink. As he did so there was a tremendous crash and something whistled by his head. The Forest Officer had fired but, deceived by the waning light, had missed him. Spots' heart was black with rage, the rage of a killer disturbed at meat. So there *was* something in the nest after all. Very well, it was plain that he could not feed in peace until he had destroyed whatever was in the nest. Without the slightest hesitation he sprang at the tree and began to claw his way up the trunk. He was mad with anger and baffled appetite. His eyes blazed with a yellow light; foam appeared round his jaws, and he snarled as he climbed. There was a startled exclamation from inside the nest, then silence.

Spots climbed until his head hit something hard and cold. It was, in fact, the muzzle of the gun; the Forest Officer was determined not to miss this time. Quite calmly he was waiting for Spots.

Spots halted in order to investigate this new



THE FOREST OFFICER PRESSED THE SECOND TRIGGER

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Accession No. _____

obstacle and, at that moment, the Forest Officer pressed the second trigger.

Spots screamed horribly as the heavy bullet crashed through his brain, pawed the air wildly for a second, and fell in a mass at the foot of the tree.

The Forest Officer and Badri descended cautiously and stood above him.

"Sahib," said Badri, in a trembling voice, "this was like no spotted one I have ever seen. What made him climb the tree? Truly he was a devil."

"That," said the Forest Officer, "is not a bad name for him. Look at his skin and teeth. Pah! The smell of him makes me sick. Go to the village, Badri, and tell the people that the spotted one is dead and that now they can sleep in peace."

So that was the end of Spots.

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# PEROO

he said

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# PEROO

## I

A LITTLE brown naked boy played happily on the beach. He was a fat, healthy, little fellow, and he was busily engaged in building a house of shells. At least that was the ultimate idea. As a matter of fact, he had not yet got beyond the stage of laying out the foundations. A rather uncertain square proclaimed the general shape of the building, but the question of the number of rooms was obviously causing great mental anxiety. His little brow puckered as he drew various lines in the sand with his finger, dividing the space into two, four and six smaller spaces respectively. He regarded the result with a thoughtful eye, and then, with a sweep of his hand, reduced the whole scheme to ruin.

"I will not build a house. I will make a ship," he announced. He got to his feet with some difficulty, for he was very fat, and trudged sturdily through the sand towards the calm-eyed little woman who was sitting near by and looking out to sea.

"I do not wish to build a house," he said

gravely to her. "I shall make a ship, a very large ship, even as large as my father's ship."

"Alas!" sighed his mother. "Where shall we sleep, thy father and I, if there is no house for us?"

"Ye shall sleep on my ship," he said. "There will be room for all three of us. It will be a very large ship."

"That is good, O my son," said the smiling mother, "but hasten to make thy ship, for know that thy father comes back from distant lands within the week."

"This I know," said the little boy, very seriously, "and there will be a gift for me. My father promised me that it should be a horse, made of wood, drawing a cart. And the horse will be fastened to the cart in a cunning way so that one may take it away from the cart and so have two things to play with. Also, the wheels of the cart will move round. My father said so."

"All this is true," nodded the mother, "and so it will be."

"Will there be a gift for thee also, O my mother?" asked the little boy thoughtfully.

"Surely," said the little woman proudly. "Never has my husband, thy father, come back from a voyage without bringing a gift for me. Look at this necklace; look at these ear-rings of coral, these bangles. All these be gifts from thy father; and I have many others."

"And will he bring thee a horse and cart also?" asked the little boy.

"Nay," laughed the mother, "our little house would be too small for two such gifts."

"Then," decided the boy, "I will *not* build a ship. I will build a large house, a very large house, a house big enough for two horses and two carts. Thus we shall each be able to play when my father is away."

He nodded his head with an air of severe determination, and stumped off once again to his heap of shells.

In a moment he was back again. "When I am big, shall I go on a ship to other countries, as my father does?" he demanded.

"Even so," said his mother lovingly. "Thy father is well spoken of, and is a good sailor. The Company will surely find work for his son. But there is still much time before that. Thou must grow big and strong and, above all, says thy father, thou must be able to swim."

"This can I do," asserted the little fellow. "Watch, O my mother," and he ran down to the water, into which he threw himself valiantly. The mother rose to her feet and walked down to the surf in which her small son was tumbling about rather like a large puppy and making vigorous play with his arms and legs.

"Go not too far out, O crosser of oceans,"

she warned, laughing. "Now do I see that thou art, indeed, a great swimmer."

The little fellow left the water, shaking himself like a dog, and ran off once more to his heap of shells.

The woman remained staring out to sea as though she hoped to see the smoke from the funnels of the big liner on which her husband, Peroo, was a Lascar of some years' service. She was very happy in the thought that, in a very few days, he would be back again and, woman-like, she allowed her mind to dwell on the present that he would surely bring her. When he had left he had spoken mysteriously. He would promise nothing, but had smiled and nodded his head and spoken vaguely of a wonderful gift. Then her thoughts flashed to the gift she had prepared for him.

In secret she had taken the exact measure of his old sea-cap and, when he returned, he would find a new cap of gay red velvet, beautifully decorated with a pattern of small white beads, the making of which had cost her scores of hours of patient toil. She hugged herself as she pictured the look of amazement that would come into his face when she produced the work of her hands and said, "This is for thee, O my husband." Then she would place it on his head, and he would look magnificent! Oh, it would be a wonderful day when her good Peroo returned.

And only five or six days more to wait. She turned to look at her little son, who was now hard at work raising the sand walls of a truly magnificent building, and smiled lovingly. She was very happy.

## II

The good ship *Dobara* was chugging along at a steady fourteen knots an hour. Aden lay well behind, and everything promised a fair run to Bombay, the journey's end. It was about ten o'clock in the morning, and the ordinary life of the ship was following its appointed course. The officer on watch paced the bridge, stopping now and again to scan the horizon for any sign of another ship. The quartermaster at the wheel glanced at the card from time to time, and reflected cheerfully that it was not so hot as it might be. The passengers were grouped about the deck engaged in their various occupations, some playing the everlasting deck games, others reading, the women, particularly, engaged in sewing or embroidering those mysterious garments which they can lay down at any moment and which never seem to be finished. Everything was very peaceful.

Peroo, the Lascar, was engaged on his daily task of adjusting the lashings of the awnings on the promenade deck. He was a careful workman, and tested every cord as he passed along, tightening

a little here and re-knotting there as seemed good to him. From time to time he climbed on to the rail and stood there, swaying easily to the slight roll of the ship, as he dealt with some detail of his work. Ordinarily Peroo sang quietly to himself as he worked, for he was of a cheerful disposition, but to-day his thoughts were gloomy. Only a few days more and he would be home again, happy in the presence of his wife and little son. But alas! he would arrive bearing no gifts. He knew perfectly well that his welcome home would be none the less sincere for that, but he hated to think of the look of disappointment that would appear on the face of both wife and child when he arrived with empty hands. And yet, poor fellow, it was not his fault. He had set carefully on one side a certain sum of money with which he proposed to buy gifts for his loved ones. As we have already seen, a horse and cart had been decided upon for the boy and, in secret, Peroo had planned to buy a certain silver brooch which, he knew, would please his wife enormously. It consisted of two anchors, crossed, and would always remind her of her sailor husband. These things were to be bought in London, but, most unfortunately for Peroo, while ashore at Marseilles one evening, he was stopped by an ordinary-looking individual who asked him for a match. Peroo, all unsuspicious, hastened to produce a box of matches. While he

was doing so he received a blow on the head from behind. When he recovered consciousness, some little time later, his pockets were empty and his money-belt gone. So when he got to London all he could do was to go and stare miserably at the gifts which he had planned to buy and for which he no longer had the money to pay.

As you see, there was cause for Peroo's gloom. However, he did not allow his thoughts to affect his work, and slowly made his way along the deck doing his appointed task. He had just tried a lifebuoy, to see that it was properly hung and in good order, when he saw something that made him gasp. A fair-haired, blue-eyed little fellow of some four years old was playing on the deck under the vigilant eye of his nurse. There was nothing remarkable in that. Peroo had seen him many times before. The extraordinary thing was that, on this particular day, the little fellow was playing with a horse and cart of really noble dimensions. The horse had a flowing mane and tail and was attached to the cart by real leather harness. A wheel was cunningly hidden in each foot so that, when the horse was held by the reins, it advanced in a most lifelike manner, dragging the cart behind it. One foot was superbly raised, and there was a look of great pride on the horse's face. The cart itself was of wood, painted blue, with four red wheels, and

was filled with the most wonderful assortment of barrels and boxes. Moreover, to make the matter perfect, the back of the cart could be let down by little chains and all the boxes and barrels taken out and put back again in a hundred different ways. Truly a marvellous horse and cart! Peroo resolutely turned his eyes away, but his soul was sick within him as he thought of his little son waiting for the promised horse and cart so eagerly. He went on working and presently, as he climbed on the rail, was aware of the little fellow, who, having abandoned his playthings, was watching him with great curiosity.

"Sailor," commanded the little fellow, "lift me up there with you."

Peroo did not understand very well what the boy said, but there was no mistaking his meaning, and he shook his head with a smile as he passed on to the next lashing. The nurse got up from her deck-chair and came forward.

"Don't interrupt the sailor, Jackie," she said. "Come and play with your new horse and cart."

The little boy obeyed, but cast a longing glance at Peroo on the rail as he went. Peroo did not notice it, for his eyes were fixed upon a brooch the nurse wore in her dress, a silver brooch consisting of two anchors crossed, the very image of the brooch he had so anxiously desired to

obtain for his wife! Peroo groaned to himself as he went on mechanically from awning to awning. The sight of the very things he had planned to buy made his disappointment almost too great to bear. Well, he thought, it was no good worrying about it; it could not be helped. Presently a rather awkward bit of work engaged his attention and he forgot his troubles.

Suddenly he heard a startled exclamation and then, "Jackie, come here this minute, do you hear!"

He looked back and saw the little boy climbing up the rails of the bulwark in an attempt to stand on the top as Peroo had been doing a moment before.

"Jackie!" commanded the nurse, but the little fellow paid no heed. He was a self-willed little boy, and wished to do what he had seen the Lascar doing. He seized the iron stanchion that supported the awning and got to the next rail. With an angry face, the nurse made a movement to rise from her chair. There was an ominous crack and the chair collapsed, as deck-chairs often do, and she found herself on the deck with a portion of her dress wedged in the ruins.

"Oh, Jackie dear, do come down," she pleaded as she struggled to free herself. But Jackie, seeing that his nurse could not get at him, decided that such an opportunity must not be lost, and

triumphantly mounted the rail and stood there as he had seen Peroo do. This latter, seeing the danger, was quickly coming back to the little boy with the intention of lifting him down, when, without warning, the ship rolled a little more than usual. Jackie staggered and disappeared over the side. The nurse uttered a piercing scream and fainted.

Peroo reached the lifebuoy in two jumps, wrenched it from its place and hurled it outboard with all his strength, shouting, as he did so, some of the very few English words he knew, "Ber-ridge ahoy! Mann o-o-verboard!" Then he turned and raced aft, leaned over the rail for a moment until he saw a patch of white on the crest of a wave, and then mounted the rail and, without hesitation, dived clean and straight into the sea.

As he did so he heard quite clearly the furious clanging of the engine-room telegraph, and a great voice bellowing from the bridge, "Man overboard! Away lifeboat's crew!"

When he came to the surface the ship was already circling, but he had no eyes for her. His whole being was concentrated on detecting the speck of white that would announce the presence of the drowning child. A wave lifted him and he saw the lifebuoy floating near by and marked its position. Again he was lifted, and this time he saw for an instant a glimpse of white some



PEROO DIVED CLEAN AND STRAIGHT INTO THE SEA

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Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

twenty yards away. Then Peroo let himself go! Not for nothing had he been nicknamed "the fish" by his fellow-Lascars. He was a superb swimmer, and he covered the distance almost with the speed of thought. When he arrived at the spot he dived. In a moment or so he came up again, shot a glance around, took a deep breath and dived again. This time he remained under the surface as long as he could, but in vain. Again he came up and looked around, then dived again like a flash of lightning. He had seen something a few yards away. As he dived he swam, and presently found what he was looking for. He broke surface, gasping but triumphant. The little boy was found! A moment to take breath, and he was swimming with his precious charge as fast as he could to the lifebuoy.

## III

On board ship things were happening at express speed. In response to the frantic clamour of the telegraph the engines had stopped. The captain himself was at the wheel, having bounded on to the bridge at the first outcry, and was handling his ship as though she were a racing yacht. Lascars were tumbling pell-mell into the lifeboat; the grey-headed serang, brandishing a boathook, was in the bows, and a burly quartermaster, standing by the rudder, was ready to

leap in the instant every man was in place. Another instant and "All ready, sir," said the quartermaster, as he dropped into the stern-sheets. "Slip!" shouted the voice of the third officer. The boat shot downwards into the water and, a second later, the oars were out and men pulling with every ounce of strength in their bodies.

"Can you see 'em?" demanded the quartermaster of the serang standing in the bows. That worthy shaded his eyes with one hand.

"I see lifebuoy," he said. "Yes, now I see Peroo. Now he dive. Now he come up. No. He get nothing. Now he dive again. Now he come up again. No. Yes! He got little boy!"

"Row!" shouted the quartermaster. The serang pointed with his boathook, and the boat shot forward.

"Peroo, he swim with little boy to lifebuoy," continued the serang. "They both all right now." A sigh of relief broke from the perspiring men, for Peroo was very popular, and they had all noticed and admired little Jackie.

"Right oh," said the quartermaster. "You keep your eye on them. Steady, men, keep together."

The boat went as quickly as the men could drive her, and the serang kept his eyes unflinchingly on the lifebuoy and its attendants. Suddenly he uttered a shrill cry and stabbed outward with his finger.

"Now what's the matter?" growled the quartermaster.

The serang turned an ashy face backwards and gasped, "Shark!" His keen eye had detected the black triangle, just above the surface of the water, that marks the dreaded man-eater of the Indian seas.

The quartermaster bounded in his seat.

"Row!" he thundered, his face working strangely. "Row for your lives!"

The Lascar boat's crew had heard the serang's gasping cry, and every man bent to his oar like a maniac. Muscles stood out on their arms like cords; their backs arched and straightened like steel bows; they sobbed for breath but they gritted their teeth and rowed as they had never rowed before. The quartermaster sat tense and alert, steering to a marvel, and the grey-haired serang stood poised in the bows, the boathook clenched in a quivering hand and his teeth bared to the gums in a ferocious snarl. "Faster!" he grunted.

"Faster!" challenged the quartermaster, and the boat leaped like a live thing through the water.

## IV

Peroo had reached the lifebuoy without any great effort and, supporting his little passenger upon it, was already at work trying to undo, to

a certain extent, the effect of the sudden immersion. As he rose and fell on the water he could see the boat coming towards him and reflected, comfortably, that he would be on board again in a few moments and none the worse. He guessed, rightly, that skill and careful nursing would soon put little Jackie right, and was glad to think that he had been so near when the little fellow fell in.

He looked at the boat again and observed that the serang standing in the bows was waving his arms about in a curious manner. He thought, at first, that he was doing it to encourage the crew, and then he noticed, as a wave lifted him again, that the serang was evidently trying to draw *his* attention to something. He cast a glance around and, the next instant, his heart seemed to stop beating. A few yards away a black triangle was cutting through the water towards him! A great fear took possession of him, and he shrieked aloud. Then, in desperation, he kicked and splashed as hard as he could. The black fin slowed down, hesitated a moment, circled, and then came on again. The monster of the deep, the great ten-foot man-eating shark, was puzzled, but he was hungry and a hungry shark is not to be frightened for long by a little splashing. Again Peroo splashed violently, and again there was a slight hesitation on the part of the shark, followed by another advance. Peroo profited by

the momentary slackening of speed to get the lifebuoy between him and his enemy. With one hand on Jackie he increased his endeavours to make as much noise as possible. But he realised, in terror, that it was in vain. The monster was not to be deceived thus. To add to his horror, he felt Jackie slipping from the buoy towards the shark. He clutched at him frantically and, at that instant, the shark turned over, and Peroo saw the great jaws open and the cruel teeth gleaming, ready for the snap that should cut in two the little fellow he had risked his life to save. For an instant the thought of his own wife and little boy flashed through Peroo's mind and then, with a great effort, he hurled the little fellow high above his head backwards and, at the same moment, kicked with all his failing strength at the great snout racing towards him. He felt his heels land with terrific force on the mark, heard the snap of the great jaws as they clanged together, felt something like a red-hot iron pass along his right arm, and then it seemed as though all Hell had broken loose. He had a vision of the boat crashing alongside; of the serang, foaming at the mouth with rage, stabbing downwards, like a man bereft of reason, with a boathook; of gasping men, with writhing features and sweat-bedewed bodies, reaching out griping fingers to him; of the quartermaster jerking an inanimate bundle of white out of the water; and then all

became dark, and Peroo tumbled into the bottom of the boat, unconscious.

## V

When Peroo opened his eyes again he found himself lying in a neat white bed in a room which he guessed to be the ship's hospital. His arm was swathed in cotton-wool and bandaged, but that did not trouble him. He was very glad to find that he still had the arm. He looked round curiously, and the slight movement he made at once drew the attention of the ship's surgeon, who was doing something at a small table.

He came up to Peroo and looked down at him with a smile on his clean-shaven face. In rough-and-tumble Hindustani he began a conversation.

"Now, how do you feel?" he asked.

"I am quite well, Sahib," replied Peroo, "except for my arm. I do not understand why it is bandaged up."

"Well," said the ship's surgeon, "you robbed the shark of his dinner and so, in revenge, he took the skin off your arm."

"Did he bite me, Sahib?" asked Peroo.

"Oh, no," laughed the surgeon. "If he had done that you would have had no arm. His side just scraped you as he passed, and, as his skin was like sandpaper, it gave you something to think about. Now, drink this!" and he held out

a glass containing an innocent-looking liquid. Peroo obediently drank it, and said, falteringly, for he feared the answer, "Is the little Sahib alive?"

"Alive?" said the surgeon. "I should think he is, the little rascal, and none the worse."

"Ah," said Peroo, in a relieved tone, and promptly fell asleep.

When he awoke again, some hours later, he felt quite ready to get up and resume his duties, but the surgeon insisted on his staying in bed, telling him that visitors might soon be expected. Sure enough, presently, the old serang appeared with a face wreathed in smiles.

"Aha, Peroo, my son," he chuckled, "is it safe to come near thee? Wilt thou kick *me* on the nose? Nay, nay, move not, young shark-fighter!" And the old man seated himself by the side of the bed and told Peroo how passengers and crew had cheered when he was lifted unconscious out of the boat, his right arm dripping blood; how anxious everyone was to know if he were badly hurt, and what pleasure went through the ship when the surgeon announced that there was no harm done which could not be put right by a day or two in bed.

"And also," concluded the old man, very mysteriously, "the Captain Sahib has spoken with me. I grow old, and this is my last voyage. Who will be the serang next voyage, askest

thou? Nay, how should I know? Better ask the Captain Sahib when he comes to visit thee," and the old man took himself off, chuckling and full of secrecy.

But, before the captain came in, Peroo had other visitors. The surgeon entered, escorting the nurse of young Jackie. That lady held the hand of her charge very tightly. He came in and stood looking at Peroo with large, round eyes. The surgeon came forward and said to Peroo, "The little Sahib has come to thank you for saving his life, and to ask you to accept a gift in return."

Peroo smiled at the surgeon and said, "Is one paid for saving the life of a child? I also have a little son."

"Is that so?" demanded the surgeon. "Then all becomes well. Look at the gift he brings, for he insists on this gift and no other. And thou *must* accept or he will break his heart."

He turned to the little boy and said, "Now, Jackie."

The nurse led the little boy to the bed and put into his hands a large parcel that she had been carrying.

Jackie put the parcel on the bed near Peroo's left hand and said, "Sailor, thank you for jumping into the sea when I fell in. I will not climb on the rail again. This is for you. Now open it." The surgeon translated to Peroo, who obediently

opened the parcel, and lo! it was the horse and cart.

"Nay, nay," said the Lascar, with shining eyes, "I cannot accept," and he shook his head.

"Peroo," said the surgeon severely, "remember what I said; you *must* accept."

"Aie," muttered Peroo, "what will my little son say when he sees this? Many thanks, many thanks, little Sahib," and, forgetting his wounded arm, he made to raise both hands to his forehead in the Eastern salaam. On the instant a stab of pain reminded him, and he dropped his right arm with a groan. The safety-pin fastening the sling which supported the arm came loose, and the hand fell weakly on the counterpane. Instantly the nurse stepped forward and, taking the famous anchor brooch out of her dress, rapidly arranged the sling and pinned it securely with the brooch. Then she turned to the doctor and said, "Tell him that I want him to keep that brooch as a little gift from me, and as a token of my gratitude to a brave man."

When Peroo heard this he became quite incapable of speech. He just lay and looked, first at the nurse and then at the boy, with eyes that, as the nurse said later, reminded her of misty stars. The surgeon, an understanding man, hustled the two away and left Peroo to himself. This latter was not, by this time, quite certain whether he was asleep or awake. He felt the

horse and cart first and then the brooch, to be really sure that it was not some wonderful dream. By the time the surgeon came back he was in such a state of excitement that the innocent-looking liquid was again administered, and Peroo fell asleep with the horse and cart alongside him, for all the world like a little child.

When he again awoke he was informed by the surgeon that he could get up and that, for the rest of the voyage, he was to be a passenger. An examination of the arm showed that it was healing beautifully. The surgeon was refastening the sling in which Peroo's arm rested, what time Peroo kept anxious eyes on the brooch, when a tap came at the door and an authoritative voice said, "May I come in?"

"The Captain Sahib," whispered the surgeon to Peroo, and then, in a louder voice, "Come in, sir."

The Captain walked straight up to Peroo, took his left hand and shook it warmly.

"Well done, Peroo," he said. His grim face softened into a smile as his gaze wandered from the brooch to the horse and cart, and then became stern again as he said bluffly, "I want a new serang next voyage. I think you the man I want. What do you say?"

"Captain Sahib," gasped Peroo, "I am unworthy. There be many others better than me."

"I do not think so," said the Captain, "nor do

the other Lascars. To-day I received a deputation from them asking that you be made serang in place of old Buldoo, who leaves the service at the end of this voyage. I told them they had made a good choice. Now, will you take the post?"

"Sahib," said Peroo quietly, "I am your man."

"Good!" said the Captain cheerily, "then here is this, a little present from me," and he pulled out of his pocket a silver whistle and chain, a serang's badge of office. He slipped the chain round Peroo's neck and, with a smile to Peroo and a nod to the surgeon, strode out of the cabin.

The surgeon waited a moment, and then said, "I also have a word to say. The passengers have asked me to give you these five hundred rupees, which they have collected, as a little remembrance of the bravery you showed in placing your body between a helpless child and a horrible death." He placed an envelope stuffed with notes on the bed, by the side of the horse and cart, and then, "Come on, serang," he said, "get up!" and he also went out, laughing at the dazed expression on Peroo's face.

## VI

A naked little brown boy was regarding, with thoughtful eyes, a house built of sand and bedecked with shells. There was no roof, and it was plain for all men to see that the house consisted of *eight* rooms. The windows were represented

by large shells, and the door was an oblong piece of wood that could be opened and closed. There was even a path leading up to the door, carefully smoothed and edged with pieces of sea-weed.

"It is finished, O my mother," he announced, after a prolonged scrutiny.

The little woman, sitting near, rose to her feet and inspected the work of her son.

"Truly," said she, "it is a noble house; thy father will be well pleased with thy work."

"He is long in coming, my father," sighed the little boy.

"Ah," said a voice behind them, "but he comes at last."

The little woman screamed aloud as she whirled round.

There stood her husband, his right arm in a sling, a silver chain round his neck and a large parcel in his left hand! The next few minutes passed in a frenzy of excitement. When calm was restored Peroo told the whole story, omitting nothing. At the proper moment he produced his gifts. His little son, on seeing the horse and cart, gave one shrill cry, and then was smitten dumb with ecstasy. He walked round and round it several times and then sat down and looked steadily at it while his father and mother regarded him with loving eyes. At last, "O my father," he gulped, and forthwith fell silent again.

The mother, her brooch firmly clenched in her right hand, looked from father to son and from son to father, in that perfect contentment that can only be felt by a completely happy wife and mother.

"And so, my husband," she said at length, "thou art now serang."

"Serang of the *Dobara*," replied Peroo proudly.

"And thy old sea-cap will never do for a serang," she said sadly.

"What matters it?" said Peroo largely. "I can get another cap."

She fumbled in her dress. "Will this be worthy of a serang?" she asked shyly, as she drew forth the gay red velvet cap she had made with such loving fingers.

Peroo stared at it for a moment, and then tore his old cap from his head and flung it far from him.

"The Captain Sahib placed the serang's silver chain and whistle round my neck," he said. "Do *thou* place the serang's cap on my head." He bent forward, and his little wife placed the cap on his head.

"A brave cap for a brave man," she whispered.

Peroo took her hand in his. He looked at her smiling face, and then turned to look at his little son, still rapt in contemplation of the horse and cart.

He gave a long sigh of pure joy. He was the happiest man in the world!

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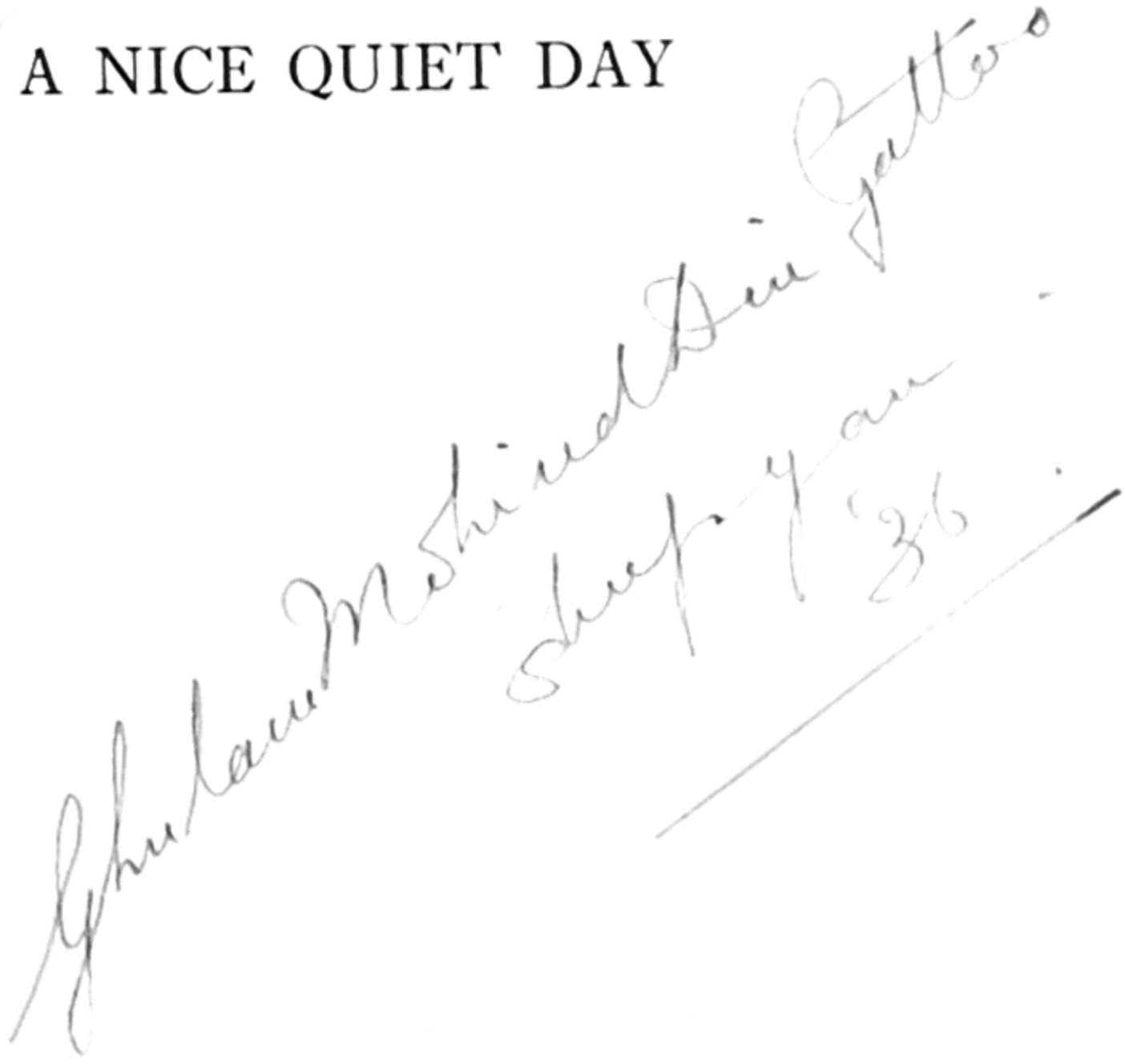
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# A NICE QUIET DAY



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# A NICE QUIET DAY

## I

It was Peterson's idea that we should have a day's shooting. I had just bought a new rifle, a Winchester ·35, and was like a child with a new toy. In other words, I was aching to see how it worked. When all is said and done, what *is* the good of a rifle unless you can shoot something with it? I had cleaned it at least half a dozen times, and gloated over it half a hundred. I had drawn Peterson's attention to its manifold perfections over and over again. I must admit that Peterson showed a most praiseworthy patience. He himself regarded all firearms as things with which no sensible man would meddle. When *he* went hunting he went equipped with a butterfly-net and a killing-bottle. He could take no interest in anything larger than an Atlas moth; and, while some miserable beetle, half an inch long, would rouse him to a passion of enthusiasm, the most thrilling account of a hand-to-hand scuffle with a wounded leopard or a three-hour stalk of a sambhar stag would leave him cold. He had the finest collection of butterflies and creepy-crawly creatures that I have ever seen outside

a museum, and spent most of his time indoors with a packet of pins and a magnifying glass. The unfortunate thing about this hobby of his was that he used to put down specimens, and then forget all about them! I shall always remember my emotions when, having dragged up a chair to the dining-table, I was about to sit down and, just in time, perceived a huge representative of the scorpion tribe firmly skewered to the wooden seat of the chair by a large darning needle! The only time I ever saw him display any real excitement, in the bungalow which I shared with him, was one evening when a bewildered bat fluttered into the sitting-room. By the time Peterson had captured it with his butterfly-net the room looked as though it had been wrecked by a cyclone, and I was carefully taking cover behind the piano.

In the pursuit of his hobby Peterson had developed no small skill as a woodsman and mountaineer, and as for walking, well, as the saying goes, he could walk the legs off a mule. He knew all the hill-country around for miles, and could say quite definitely where such and such a wild goat or such a big tusker might be observed. They did not interest him in the least, but he had fallen over them, I suppose, and so knew where they were. He was a very good-hearted fellow and, as I was a newcomer, was quite ready to do the honours of the district and

show me round. It was an occasion for sorrow with him that I openly expressed my scorn for his proclivities as a beetle-chaser, but he bore me no ill-will and, noting my wild enthusiasm for my new rifle, he kindly suggested a day in the hills so that I might try out the new weapon.

"We'll have a nice quiet day," he said. "I'll show you all the best places and you can get a shot here and there, if we have any luck. We could do with a haunch of venison. It would be a pleasant change from the stuff that the cook calls meat. I'll take my net along in case we see anything really worth attention."

I passed the insult by in lofty silence. I was not going to quarrel with him so long as I had the chance of being shown the various stamping-grounds of which I was so anxious to make the acquaintance.

Taking my silence for consent, he went on, "We'd better turn out early so that we can be well away by daybreak. It's the best time to see things."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," he explained, "the deer and wild goat, to say nothing of bear, leopard and boar, like to get comfortably settled after their night's hunting and feeding before the sun gets too high. They seem to like the higher ground for their day's rest and, if we are out early, we can catch

them as they're moving. Besides, one can always hope to spot a rare moth——"

"Never mind the moth," I broke in brutally. "Keep your thoughts on the big things. I'm not going to cart a nine-pound rifle about for the pleasure of taking pot-shots at moths. Don't forget that, my lad!"

"I'm not likely to forget anything about that rifle so long as you live in this bungalow," he retorted, with heavy sarcasm, "but I'm prepared to put up with it provided you produce the venison afore-mentioned from time to time."

"You show me the deer," I said, "and I'll produce the venison all right. Now then, what's the plan?"

"Well," he commenced, "we get away early, as I said, and make our way to the high ground as quickly as we can. We keep our eyes open and leave the rest to chance. We can take some sandwiches and our water-bottles, and lunch when and where we like. Then again we ought to see something just before sunset on the return journey. I'll take you to places where I have seen gural, kharkar and wild boar, and, of course, there is always a sporting chance of a shot at a black bear or a leopard and——"

"That will be enough to go on with, thank you," I said. "Well, I'll turn in now, and you can give me a call at the psychological moment to-morrow morning, eh?"

"Right you are," he said. "Pleasant dreams!"

"I'm going to dream of ten-foot leopards and thirty-six inch sambhar horns," I laughed as I went out. "Good-night!"

I went to my own room, had just one little peep at my beloved rifle, and in five minutes was in bed and asleep.

## II

I had apparently been asleep for a quarter of an hour when I was roughly awakened by a heavy grip on my shoulder, and a voice growled in my ear, "Get up! Get up! It's time to be moving."

"Don't be silly," I muttered. "We've only just come to bed. Go away!" and I turned over and went to sleep again. Again, in a vague sort of way, I heard the voice, "Turn out, you lazy blighter! Show a leg!"

"Gurrh-rh-rh-rh," said I, with my nose in the pillow. "Go away! Go—— help! *What* are you doing, you ass?"

"Waking you up," said Peterson placidly, as he removed the cold, wet sponge from the back of my neck where he had thoughtfully placed it.

I jumped out of bed, full of wrath, and advanced upon him in warlike fashion.

"Look here!" I shouted, "if you do that again——"

"No need," he chuckled. "You're up now. Buck up and dress, and let's be off. We've no time to lose."

He went out, leaving a lighted candle on my dressing-table. It was very cold and I dressed rapidly.

"Come on! Come on!" shouted Peterson. "I've got the sandwiches and the water-bottles."

"I'm with you," I sang. "Oh, it's fine to be up in the morning but it's better to stay in bed!" and I seized my rifle and cartridge-belt and hurried out of my bedroom. Peterson ran his eye over my equipment and again gave his little chuckle.

"You'll be sorry you're not a beetle-chaser, as you call me, before the day's over," he said. "Now then, off we go!" and he set out towards the nearest hill. I slipped the rifle into the crook of my left arm and followed. I thought to myself, "Sorry, eh? Well, where you can go, my lad, I can follow."

Brave words! Brave words! How little I knew Peterson!

When we had gone half a mile or so I began to realise that I should have my work cut out to keep up with my guide. He strode along, his knees slightly bent, and whether uphill or downhill it was all the same, his pace never varied. As he walked he rolled a cigarette, and gave forth an unending stream of informa-

tion about various features of the surrounding scenery.

"We're making for that hill," he said, nodding to a rather top-heavy looking mass that stood out clear and black against the fast-lightening sky.

"Are we likely to find anything there?" I asked hopefully.

"Gural," he replied, in a laconic tone.

I was thrilled. I hoped desperately that I might have the chance of a shot at one of these rare habitants of the mountains. "Do we go right up the face?" I asked thoughtfully, for it had all the appearance of a very formidable climb.

"No," he answered, "we'll work round and get up from behind."

"That's better," I said relievedly. "I'm no cragsman and besides——"

I stopped dead in my tracks. Before my amazed eyes, half the hill quietly slid away into the valley! There was a heavy, rumbling sort of noise, and then silence. I shook my head, closed my eyes, and opened them again. No, I was *not* dreaming. The hill really had diminished to half its size.

"I say, Peterson," I gasped, "did you see that?"

"Of course I saw it," he replied, in a surprised tone. "Why?"

"Well," I said, "does that sort of thing often happen round here?"

"What sort of thing? A landslide? Oh yes, now and again," he admitted. "It's a nuisance, isn't it? That was one of the best gural grounds I know, and now it's gone for good. Well, we'll bear away to our left a bit. There's a very good place I know and—— By Jove! Did you see that fellow?" and he was off, like a flash of lightning, net a-flutter, in pursuit of a gorgeously marked moth that had just flitted by. In two or three minutes he was back again with the unfortunate insect safely secured to his helmet. I was still staring at the mutilated hill.

"Look here, Peterson," I murmured. "Suppose we had been on top!"

"But we weren't!" he said testily, "so what does it matter? Come on and don't be so ready to shed tears!"

I followed in silence, marvelling at the calm way in which he accepted what had, to me, been an appalling spectacle.

But I soon had to think about what I was doing. Peterson was following a perfectly diabolical path. It led through a collection of bushes that seemed to consist entirely of thorns, and every single thorn was apparently determined to penetrate my clothes. I had to stop constantly to disentangle myself, and my hands were quickly torn and scratched in twenty places. I was, of course, hampered by my rifle, and so I am afraid that I made rather heavy weather

of it. Peterson was, as usual, rolling a cigarette, and seemed quite at ease as he strode along, glancing from right to left, and occasionally pausing to examine some aspect of the landscape more carefully. Daybreak had now come, and it behoved us to walk warily and, as far as possible, without noise. Peterson gave me a few whispered instructions and we pressed on. The ground began to rise again and a new trouble came upon me. My boots had rope soles, and they did not afford a firm grip on the pine-needles with which the ground was covered to a depth of several inches. I kept slipping as I walked, and had to watch where I put my feet. Peterson, the wily old warrior, had rubber soles to *his* boots and experienced no difficulty in walking. It seemed to me that his eyes were never on the ground. Mine, on the contrary, were never off it! Then, to add to my misery, we got among some more of those infernal bushes. What with pine-needles under foot and thorns above ground, I was rapidly being reduced to a state of perspiring imbecility. But I made no complaint. I knew that, if I did, Peterson would talk of it for the next six months, so I struggled on grimly and in silence. He was about ten yards ahead, and I was wrestling with a particularly beastly bit of thorn-bush when I heard him give a quick "Hist!" I looked up and saw him squatting on his heels, and pointing steadily

with outstretched finger to a certain point in the foreground. I tore myself free of the thorns, thereby adding a few more scratches to my collection, and plunged forward. Immediately my foot slipped and down I came on my knees. I rose hastily, murmuring something about pine-needles as I did so, and rubbed the bruises. There was a muttered "Come on, you ass!" from Peterson, and again I was tearing my way through thorns. I was breathing heavily by the time I reached his side. His hand had dropped, but he was still gazing steadfastly into space.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"It *was* a kharkar," he muttered sardonically, "about half an hour ago—that is to say, when I first warned you. It is well on the way to Thibet now, of course."

I sat down and laid my rifle carefully across my knees. I could not trust myself to speak, but I looked longingly at the back of Peterson's head, and thought of the pleasure it would give me to hit him there with the butt. Meanwhile, he was rolling another of his eternal cigarettes.

"Ah, well," he said at last, "better luck next time! Now we'll have to climb a bit. The gural will be lying down and getting their daily sun-bath and, if we can only get to a position above them, you should have a chance of a dropping shot. What about it?"

"Lead on, Macduff!" I said valiantly.

Off we went, and I found that all the pine-needles in the world had been strewn on the route that Peterson took. I thanked Heaven that we had left the thorn-bushes behind and, although I slipped about like a camel on a greasy road, I managed to make decent progress and reached the top of the hill safely. Peterson was already lying down when I got there, and peering over the far edge of what looked to me like the effect of another landslide. I approached in a crouching position and noticed a large crack in the ground between the portion on which Peterson was lying and the main mass of the hill. I kept on the hill side of the crack and lay down.

"Come here!" whispered Peterson.

"No fear!" said I, very earnestly.

He turned his head and saw me. I beckoned him with my finger, and he crawled on his hands and knees to where I was lying. "What is it?" he asked.

I pointed to the crack.

"Do you see that?" I said.

"I'm not blind," he answered. "It's only a crack. There are lots of them about. Come to the edge. I've an idea I can see a gural lying on a ledge of rock."

"But," I expostulated, "the weight of the two of us may be too much for the piece of the hill

that's giving and, if I fire a shot, the whole show may crash down the hillside and take us with it."

"I've never known such a fellow for meeting trouble half-way," he growled, in an exasperated tone. "The crack's been there for a hundred years probably, and now you're expecting all sorts of things to happen. Come along, man! Of course, if you're frightened, all right!" and he crawled off to his former position.

Naturally, there was only one thing for me to do after he had said that, and I was at his side in an instant. We lay and looked, and presently he whispered, "There, on that ledge, about a hundred yards down. Do you see him?"

I gazed with all my eyes, but could only see what looked like a piece of rock. I described what I saw, and Peterson chuckled.

"Watch the smaller end of your piece of rock," he advised. I kept my eyes on the part mentioned, and presently I detected a slight movement there. Peterson nudged me.

"His ears flapping," he said.

I nodded and drew the rifle carefully to my shoulder. I got the sights on, and had my finger on the trigger when I suddenly remembered the great crack separating the piece of the hill on which we were lying from the parent mass. I had a painful vision of the morning's landslide, and an even more painful prospect of Peterson

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I BENT AN EARNEST GAZE ON THE GURAL

and myself taking the leading part in a similar occurrence.

I whispered, "I don't like to shoot. I'm afraid of this bit of hill giving."

"Shoot, man, shoot!" grunted Peterson, "or else let me have the rifle."

I was shocked. Peterson, of all people, to use my beautiful rifle! That beetle-chaser!

I bent an earnest gaze on the gural and, glancing carefully along the sights, I pressed the trigger. There was the crash of the report, and then a series of smaller crashes as the gural, greatly surprised but obviously quite unhurt, went bounding down the hillside. I turned to Peterson.

"I must have allowed too much for the pressure of the air against the hillside," I explained airily.

"Ah, thank you, thank you!" he said gratefully. "I'm glad to know why you missed. Do please mind the crack as you come back. I'd hate you to fall down."

He drew back politely to let me pass and, as I stalked by, said in a loud voice, "Way there, way for the King's Prizeman!"

"All right, Peterson," I said savagely. "You wait. I'll get my own back!"

He grinned cheerfully and said, "Well, what about lunch? I think we've earned it."

III

Now, although pine-needles are perfectly horrible to walk on, there's no doubt that they make a most delightful couch, and so, when we had eaten our sandwiches, we stretched out and prepared to have a thoroughly enjoyable rest. The sun beat down upon us, but not too strongly; the sky was blue with a small patch of cloud here and there; the scent of the pine trees was in our nostrils; we were feeling at peace with all the world. Peterson lay with his helmet tilted over his eyes, and I pulled at my pipe and thought that life was good and worth living. After a long time I said drowsily, "Is that moth that you captured any good?"

Peterson sat up and muttered, "Bless me! I'd forgotten all about it. Let's have a look."

He dragged off his helmet, and I lay and watched him as he peered at the insect and wondered lazily to myself how any sane man could work up enthusiasm over such miserable little creatures. Suddenly he gave a kind of yelp.

"I s-s-s-say," he stuttered, "there's something queer about this. It's not what I thought. It's different. I've never seen anything quite like it. I believe—God bless me!—I really do believe it's a new variety. Oh, good gracious! If it is, they'll call it after me—Petersoniensis—oh Lord! What luck! What luck!"

"And *all* due to me," I said calmly.

"Don't be a fool," he growled. "I should have come out to-day in any case."

He was greatly excited and, leaping to his feet, began pacing up and down, holding the helmet in his hand as though it were some holy relic.

"Sit down, you chump!" I said, "and put your helmet on. Your precious moth won't save you from sunstroke."

But his discovery had made it impossible for him to rest any longer. He was eager to be afoot and on the look-out for further captures. He hauled me, protesting violently but in vain, to my feet, and we set off once more, Peterson in the lead, alertness in every line of his body and his eyes everywhere at once. He padded along a sort of goat-track, and I followed some two or three yards behind, ready for any emergency. The short rest after lunch had done me good, and I felt quite fresh again and capable of anything. Peterson turned his head and said, "Keep an eye open for butterflies, there's a good chap! There'll be no game stirring at this hour of the day."

"Right oh!" I said cheerfully. "If I see a butterfly, I'll shoot it through the heart at sight."

Peterson grunted and began to roll another cigarette. Then, without any warning, he stood still. I moved silently to his side, and saw that

he was staring at a bit of curiously coloured wood that lay across the track.

"Back!" he whispered.

Wondering, I fell back half a dozen paces.

"Give me your knife," he muttered.

I dragged out my hunting-knife and handed it to him. Without a word he took it and proceeded to cut a branch from a bush near by. Still saying nothing, he trimmed it until he had a useful stick about four feet long. Holding this in his right hand he advanced silently along the track and, suddenly leaping forward, struck viciously at the curiously coloured bit of wood that lay across the path. To my intense surprise the latter flung upwards from the middle and I saw the wicked triangular head of a snake, jaws agape, at one end.

"Got him!" shouted Peterson triumphantly.

The snake's back was broken and it lay helpless.

"That's a karait," Peterson informed me. "Its bite means death in two minutes. Lucky I spotted it!"

He poked his weapon underneath the now harmless reptile and hurled it down the hillside. He was preparing to throw his stick after it when I stopped him.

"Peterson," I said, "I'll carry the bludgeon for you in case you want it again. Kindly continue to lead the way."

He laughed and said, "Always keep your eyes open for snakes. If I'd trodden on that little fellow you'd have had to carry me home, and it's a long way."

He strode forward and I followed, admiring his iron nerve. I wondered if I should ever become as callous as Peterson. In the meantime I scrutinised the path we were following with an eye like a searchlight.

Presently we swung round the flank of a hill and came to a queer-looking patch of ground.

"Oh Lord," I said. "Another landslide!"

It really looked as though a large, dirty hand had been swept from the summit of the hill downwards as far as the eye could follow. There was a width of ten or twelve yards to be crossed, and it seemed to be composed of dark grey shale. Peterson was speaking and I listened carefully.

"Now," he said, "we've got to cross this. Watch me go across, and then you follow and do exactly as I do. You make one big effort and you get your foot on that rock." He pointed to a piece of rock that stuck out in the middle of the slide and continued, "Then you take off again from there and so get to the other side. *But*, if you miss the rock, you'll go sliding down the hill, and I don't mind telling you that there's a drop of three hundred feet a little farther down."

I looked down the hillside and, sure enough, there seemed to be a kind of break in the colour-scheme at a spot a fairly considerable distance from where we were standing.

"Thank you for these kind words," I murmured. "Please may we go another way?"

"It would take hours," said Peterson. "Besides, there's no danger, really. Now, I'm off. Watch carefully!"

I watched with all my eyes. He took a little run, ploughed through the shale and got his feet on the rock. Then he gave a sort of push off, plunged forward again and reached the other side. It really looked very easy.

"There you are!" he shouted. "Come on!" and turned to look for butterflies. As I gazed, he disappeared among the bushes.

Well, you know, I just hated the sight of that shale. It looked so horribly greasy. Still, I had to get across, so I took a deep breath and dashed forward just as Peterson had done. I arrived safely at the rock, and placed my foot firmly upon it. Now, whether the sudden arrival of Peterson had loosened it in its bed or whether the additional weight of my rifle and cartridge-belt was too much for it (Peterson and I were of exactly the same weight) I don't know, but what happened was that, the instant my foot touched it, it gave and began to move down the slide! I lost my balance, fell on my back, and

found myself slipping slowly down after the rock. Instinctively I adopted the old mountaineering trick of spreading out my arms and legs crosswise, so as to cover as much surface as possible, but it had no effect. I continued to slip downwards. Happily I still clutched my rifle in my right hand, and I proceeded to push the butt frantically into the ground in an attempt to stop my progress. But it met with no resistance, and suddenly it came into my mind that, unless something wonderful happened, I was going to be killed. I did not know what had become of Peterson. Doubtless he had taken it for granted that I was safely over. In any case, he could do nothing, and it never occurred to me to shout to him. I was caught and must rely upon myself if I wished to get home alive that night. As I strove desperately to get my rifle-butt against something solid I had a clear vision of that three-hundred foot drop awaiting me, and the horrible consequences when I went over. For a moment I closed my eyes, fearing to see the edge of the slide. Then, in an access of rage, I tore them open.

"I *won't* die with my eyes closed!" I growled. I could now see clearly where the drop began, and was raking the slide feverishly with my eyes when oh! blessed sight! a small tree-stump just showed above the surface to the right, and near my right foot. I steered savagely towards it with

the help of my rifle and, after an instant, got my right foot firmly planted against it. Glory be! It held! My downward progress stopped, and I lay back and sweated with relief. I can assure my readers that I know exactly how the condemned prisoner feels when the reprieve arrives!

After a moment or two I realised that, if I stayed there much longer, I should never be able to summon up courage for the dash across the second half of that infernal landslide. I got to my knees very gingerly, rose to my feet and tried the stump. Good old stump! It seemed as firm as though it were rooted to the centre of the earth. I hesitated for one instant, then gave a mighty push with my right foot, sprang convulsively forward, and in three jumps was on firm ground again. I sat down, waited until I got my breath, and then, deliberately raising my rifle to my shoulder, I shot that landslide clean through the middle! It was childish, I know, but wait until you have had a similar experience and see what you will do. I was nearly hysterical.

There was a sound of running footsteps, a mighty crashing of branches, and Peterson came through the bushes at the double.

"Hit anything?" he demanded.

"Yes," said I soberly. "I've shot your accursed landslide—right through the heart."

He looked at me in amaze and then at the slide.

Suddenly he cried, "What are you doing here, so far down? And where's the rock in the middle?"

"It's gone over the edge," I answered quietly, "and, but for the grace of God, I should have followed it."

He regarded me for a moment.

"H'm," he said, "I never thought of that. Sorry! How did you get across then?"

I pointed to my friend, the tree-stump. He nodded and patted me on the shoulder.

"Well done, old lad!" he said. "I give you full marks."

Do you know, I felt absurdly pleased. Praise from Peterson was praise indeed, and just at that moment I needed a word of encouragement badly. He sat down by my side and began to roll a cigarette.

"Say when you're ready to go on," he remarked casually.

My nerves soon became normal again and I jumped to my feet. "Now for the next sensation!" I exclaimed gaily.

But nothing happened out of the ordinary as we tramped along quietly, keeping our eyes and ears open for any sign that might indicate the presence of game. Our luck seemed to be out, and finally, as we were climbing what seemed to me to be our hundredth hill, Peterson said, "I think we'll make a bee-line for home. There's

not much chance of seeing anything now and, in any case, it'll soon be too dark to shoot."

"Peterson," I said desperately, "I've carried this rifle and ammunition all day and, so far, I've only shot a landslide! Say what you like, I *can* shoot, and you've just got to show me something to shoot at!"

Peterson threw back his head and laughed.

"Well," he said, "if you want to waste cartridges, could you have a better mark than that?" and he pointed to a pear-shaped object that was dangling from the outflung branch of a tree about eighty yards away. It stood forth clearly against the sky and was, indeed, an admirable target.

"Excellent!" said I. "Now watch and you'll see some shooting."

I whipped the rifle to my shoulder and fired. The pear-shaped object burst into a hundred pieces and, at the same instant, I heard Peterson gasp and then yell, "Run, you fool, run!"

I turned and saw him running at top speed for the summit of the hill. He was waving his butterfly-net in a forward movement as he ran, and I, realising that there was something radically wrong, followed as quickly as I could. It was not until he was down the other side of the hill, across a small stream and well among the bushes in the valley that he halted and looked anxiously back the way we had come. Presently he re-

moved his helmet, mopped his brow and heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank Heaven," he gasped, "that we're to windward. They'll go with the wind."

"What will?" I asked, innocently enough.

"Oh Lord," he groaned. "Where *were* you brought up? Don't you know a hornets' nest when you see one?"

"I do not," I answered blithely. "But, if that was a hornets' nest, it is one no longer. I got it absolutely in the middle and it burst like a shell. The dear hornets will have to find another home."

Peterson looked at me in a stupefied kind of way.

"Do you know, you ass," he said, "that it's a miracle you've not been stung to death?"

"Peterson," I said firmly, "I have suffered so much from your activities this day that being stung to death would be a pleasant and appropriate ending. Now, if you do not wish me to have your blood on my hands, lead me home!"

. . . . . .

I crawled into bed that night more dead than alive. Before going to sleep I shouted to Peterson.

"Peterson," I said, "be sure to let me know in good time when you are going to have another nice quiet day in the hills, won't you?"

"All right," he replied. "But why?"

"So that *I* can stop at home," I said. "Peterson, good-night!"

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# FROM MIDNIGHT TO ONE A.M.

From Midnight to one A.M.

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Excellent

# FROM MIDNIGHT TO ONE A.M.

THE little French clock in the drawing-room struck twelve. The man in the big chair looked up from his book at the clock, checked the time and muttered, "Midnight! H'm, later than I thought."

He stood up, yawned, stretched himself, and walked to the door, turning off the electric light as he passed out of the room. Ten minutes later the house was in darkness. Complete silence reigned in the drawing-room for a little while, and then the big brass standing lamp, that throws a clear, soft light on the arm-chair, said, in a grumbling tone, "The master reads too much and too late. I thought he was never going to bed."

The table with the ivory and ebony top, the one that stands beneath the big window, replied, "I expect the book was interesting."

"That is no excuse," said the big lamp severely. "He gets up at six every morning, and six hours' sleep is not enough."

"Oh," said the table, "I don't know. He has a little sleep in the afternoon and, anyway, he is not a great sleeper. I have been with him now

for twenty years or so, and I know what I am talking about."

The big lamp was the latest addition to the drawing-room, and he was very anxious to be friendly with the rest of the furniture and ornaments, so he said, "Twenty years! Dear me! That is a long time. Where did you first meet the master, may I ask?"

"Well," laughed the table, "to tell the truth, he met *me*. A clumsy servant knocked me over and I fell on his foot. This happened in a big shop in Amritsar. When he had looked carefully at me he bought me."

"Amritsar," said the big lamp. "That is in India, I believe."

"Correct!" said the table. "In the Punjab."

"Really," exclaimed the big lamp, "I had no idea you came from India. I quite thought you were Egyptian."

"Oh no," said the table. "If you look at me you will see that the design on my surface is entirely different from that of an Egyptian table."

"How very interesting!" said the big lamp. "I come from Damascus myself. A wonderful place, I assure you! The bazaars are, I should imagine, the wealthiest in the world."

"Pardon me," said a hammered silver vase that stood on the table, "but have you ever visited Delhi?"

"No," answered the big lamp politely. "I am

sorry to say that I have never been farther East than Damascus."

"I thought not," said the silver vase sweetly. "*I* come from the Chandni Chowk in that city, and if there is a richer street in the world, I should like to see it."

A chorus of indignation broke out at once.

"Bond Street," cried a silver inkstand that stood on the writing-table.

"The Rue de la Paix," chimed the little French clock.

"The Khan al Khalili here, in this very town," insisted a large and imposing-looking copper tray that stood on a six-legged wooden stand.

"Enough! Enough!" begged the big lamp. "I seem to have been foolish. I have never heard of those places. Do believe me when I say that my unfortunate remark was due rather to my pride in my native city than to a desire to boast. I had no idea that you gentlemen had travelled so much. This is most exciting. Are there any other travellers with us?"

Now the various inhabitants of the drawing-room had been listening quietly to the conversation between the big brass lamp and the inlaid table and, just like humans, deciding whether the former was going to be pleasant to live with or not. His last remark made a very good impression, and so everyone was quite ready to talk to him.

"We come from Japan," said half a dozen colour prints hanging on the walls, "and we are pleased to be in such honourable company."

"The Japanese are famous for their courtesy," remarked a beautifully tinted porcelain bowl that stood on a shelf in the place of honour. "We Persians recognise politeness when we see it. *I* come from Teheran."

"We also are from Persia," mumbled three or four rugs that lay, here and there, on the floor, "but from different districts."

The brass lamp thought of complimenting them on their lovely designs and colouring, but decided to keep quiet and listen.

"Teheran is a fine city, a fine city," muttered a great copper ewer that had delightful pictures of animals and flowers chiselled in patterns all over its surface, "but it cannot compare with Baghdad. Now, there is a city for you—history, romance, beauty, all combined."

"Indeed, that is true," agreed the big lamp. "I have heard much of the wonders of that city and its famous Caliph. Do you come from Baghdad?"

"I do," replied the ewer, "and a most unpleasant journey I had. I travelled all the way to Cairo wrapped up in a piece of dirty sacking. My owner had heard of this city and its wealthy visitors and brought me here, hoping to get a good price for me."

"And did he?" said the inlaid table, almost falling over in his eagerness to hear the answer.

"He did," replied the ewer, "but," with a chuckle, "not half of what the master paid when he bought me a few days later."

"That sounds like robbery to me," said the big lamp rather diffidently.

"Robbery! You talk of robbery," burst in a cheerful little voice. "You ought to come to my part of the world if you wish to see what thieves are like."

Everyone turned to look at a small copper jug with a rose nozzle that stood on a corner cupboard.

"Yes," he went on, "you travel about, as I used to do, with a caravan in Central Asia for a few months, and you will learn something about thieves and robbery. I honestly believe my owner never slept with both eyes closed. He came from Bokhara, and I have heard him say that some men of the caravans would steal your back teeth if you slept with your mouth open!" There was a ripple of laughter at this and, as it died down, "Talking of caravans," rumbled a hoarse voice from a dark-brown and blue rug beneath the inlaid table, "I don't see any camels here in Egypt like those we have in Baluchistan. Great hairy fellows they are with two humps; Bactrian, I think they call them."

"Oh, please excuse me for one moment,"

interrupted the big lamp, "but we were never quite sure in Damascus if there were such a country. Do you actually come from Baluchistan?"

"That is where I first saw the light," answered the Baluchi rug, in a good-humoured growl, "and where I lived for some years, all among the mountains. I left the country on the back of one of those Bactrian camels I mentioned just now, and a long, cold and bumpy journey it was too. I was one of a bale of twenty rugs all nicely folded and well wrapped up in strong, rough cloth. One day we were following a hill-path when the pack-ropes that fastened the bale to the camel broke and we went rolling down the hillside. Happily, after we had gone about a hundred yards we struck a rock with such force that the bale burst and the whole twenty of us went flying in all directions. It took our owner a long time to get us all packed up again, and I leave you to imagine what he said while he was doing it."

He laughed grimly, and the lamp said, in a faint voice, "What a terrible experience! I have never liked mountains. One is always hearing about accidents there."

"Accidents!" grunted the Baluchi rug. "Accidents are the least thing you expect among the mountains. You ought to talk with my friend in the hall outside. *He* comes from the Khyber

Pass and Afghanistan generally." Both the Indian table and the hammered silver vase shuddered delicately.

"We know those Pathans of old," they said. "Very rough and quarrelsome creatures!"

"Well, it's my friend's business to be quarrelsome," said the Baluchi rug. "He's an Afridi knife. You'll see him hanging on the wall. He told me the other day that he has killed three men. As a matter of fact, the master has written a long story about him, but he's not a bit proud and, once you get to know him, you're bound to like him. But, I admit, he would rather fight than talk any day."

"In that case, then," said the big lamp mildly, "it is probably just as well that he is in the hall. I am told that there are lots of swords and spears and other knives there; they will be good company for him. He might find our society here a little dull."

"Oh ho!" laughed the Baluchi rug. "*You* will not find any reason to complain of dullness if ever he comes in here when he is in a bad temper!"

"I sincerely hope he never will, then," said the big lamp, in a nervous tone. "I am sure we all agree that we can do without that kind of excitement."

"You are quite right," murmured a two-handled copper jar that stood behind and to the left of the Bokhara jug. "Give me peace at all

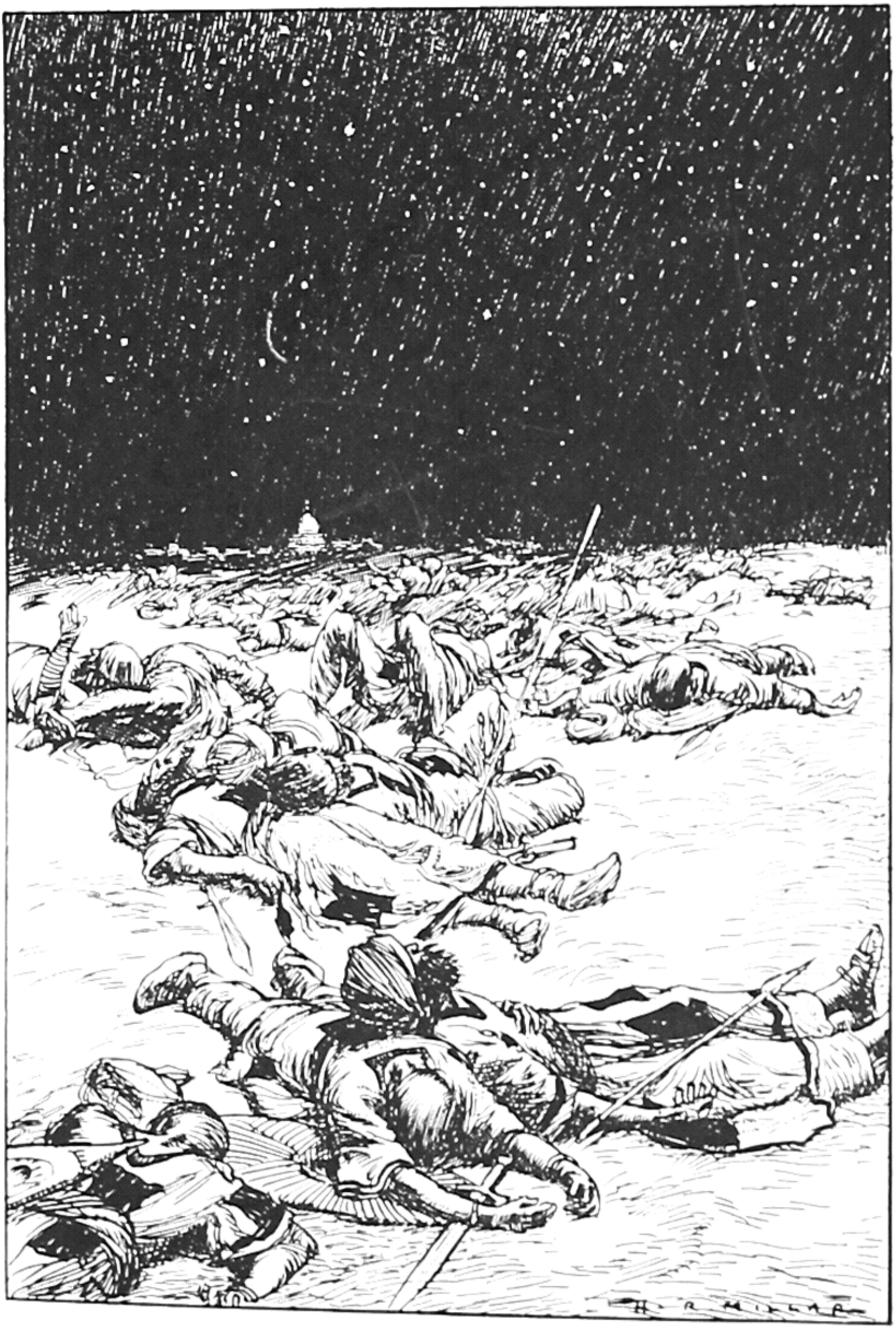
times. I have seen all the fighting and excitement I ever want to see. You will understand what I mean when I say that I originally belonged to the Mahdi and lived in Omdurman. You can see his name on my side."

There was a sudden silence which the big lamp broke by saying, "Then you must have seen some glorious sights. Would it tire you to tell us what you think of the great and famous men and deeds you have observed? What is your chief impression of war? I mean, when you think of war, what is the first thought that comes into your mind?"

"I will tell you," said the copper jar heavily. "Whenever I think of war I think of mud and blood, sand and blood, flies and blood. I see pictures of men, horribly wounded, dying of thirst; I hear the screams of mangled horses and the shrieks of terrified women and children. I listen, once again, to the awful sounds that come from a stricken field once night has fallen, and I see the sky lighted up with the flames of burning villages as it used to be. But, more than anything else, do I remember the mud, the sand, the flies and the blood. It was horrible!"

"But," said the big lamp, persisting in his search for information, "you have said nothing of the glory of war."

"For a very good reason," replied the copper jar. "I never saw any. And I can tell you some-



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thing else. It is only the people who have never seen war who talk about its glory. The fighting-men, the widows, the orphans, *they* know the truth about war!"

"Well, well," came once again the cheerful voice of the little Bokhara jug, "let us get back to the original subject. Speak up, you travellers!"

"Yes, yes," agreed everyone, "let us talk about more pleasant things."

Two or three articles in the drawing-room took on a look of importance prior to addressing the meeting, but resumed their ordinary appearance as a smooth, calm voice flowed from beneath the shallow dish in which stood the Persian ewer. It was the gaily-painted wooden stand that spoke.

"Hear *me*, friends," he said. "I am no traveller. Only once have I taken a journey and that ended here. Travel, they say, fills the eye but empties the pocket. Moreover," and his voice rose proudly, "we, who live in Mecca, have no need to travel to see the world. The world comes to us!"

All those present listened in a respectful silence.

"Aye, it does," murmured a flat, metal plate inscribed in Hebrew characters, "and not only to you. I come from Jerusalem, which is no ordinary city."

"This is remarkable!" exclaimed the big lamp, quite rigid with interest. "To think that we have

two among us that have lived in such holy places!"

"I also have acquired a little merit," came an humble voice from a Thibetan prayer-wheel that lay, almost invisible, at the back of the shelf. "I am from Lhasa, and many believers come on pilgrimage thereto. The holy lama, to whom I belonged, died with me in his hands."

"S-s-s-s-so," hissed a brazen cobra that, curled up on its tail, bore a candle-holder on its head, "and here am I, that come from Benares! Oft have I seen the banks of holy Ganges aswarm with pious folk. Many in number are they."

The room fell quiet as the various occupants thought about this extraordinary gathering of races and religions.

"It seems to me," said the big lamp, at length, "that, if our master is not careful, his drawing-room will be taken for a museum."

There was a general laugh, and everyone thought that the big lamp had expressed himself rather neatly.

"I must say," he added, "that, in the whole of my life, I have never found myself in such distinguished society. And," he finished, in rather a superior tone, "I may inform you that I am just over one hundred years old!"

To his great surprise no one seemed to pay any particular attention to this statement.

"Oh, are you?" said the copper tray indiffer-

ently. "I'm a hundred and nine myself. My first owner's name and the year I was made are engraved on me quite clearly."

"Don't talk so much about it," grumbled a copper bowl that stood next to the Persian on the shelf. "I'm a good fifty years older than you."

"You look it," said the copper tray unkindly. "I've never seen a bowl that looked so battered."

"Here, you!" began the bowl explosively. "What do you——"

"Pardon me," came a sleepy voice from the same shelf, as another copper bowl took up the age question. "If it is of any interest to you two, I may say that I am exactly two hundred and thirty-two years old. You young people should respect your elders a little more and not make quite so much noise."

The others felt snubbed, but the feeling of being treated like naughty children soon passed and then, "Of course," said the big lamp reflectively, "age is not everything."

"Hear! Hear!" snapped the copper tray. "No fool like an old fool!"

"Are you, by any chance, referring to us?" demanded hotly the two copper bowls, speaking together.

"Take it as you like," said the copper tray in an insulting tone.

A babel of indignant voices broke forth.

Everything in the room was speaking at once. Arguments, questions, answers flew like hail. Every speaker had something to say on the quarrel that had so suddenly risen and the relative values of age and wisdom that had brought it about. The various voices got higher and louder. The rough accents of the Baluchi rug mingled with the pure tones of the hammered silver vase; the sweet chime of the little French clock tried in vain to make itself heard through the hoarse rumble that seemed to come from the ewer of Baghdad. The two copper bowls and the copper tray jeered at everyone impartially; the Bokhara jug shouted with delight, and there was a distinct snarl in the voice of the former resident in Omdurman that seemed to indicate that his hatred of war was in danger of being forgotten. The religious members of the meeting, helped by the Japanese prints, strove to make peace while the big brass lamp shuddered with horror at the trouble his careless remark had caused. There was every prospect of words coming to blows when, suddenly, a voice cut through the tumult like a knife. "SILENCE! ALL!"

Every sound stopped instantly. Each of the disputants was wondering who this might be who spoke as authoritatively as the master himself. Then, with one accord, they turned to the corner cupboard and looked at the small blue

figure that stood well in front of the copper jar from Omdurman.

It was what is known as a Ushabti figure and had been taken from the tomb of a king of the Ancient Egyptians. It was a representation of the god Osiris, Lord of the Under World.

In the same steely voice the figure began, "You weary me, children all, with your disputes about age and your quarrels as to wisdom. Know you not that you are, as yet, but babes, and that your learning is but the worthless knowledge of infants? Now, be silent, for I would rest and dream."

"You will excuse me, sir," said the big lamp rather irritably, for he felt called upon to speak up for the others, who seemed, for some queer reason, somewhat abashed, "but you take a high hand. Do you mind telling me where *you* come from and how old *you* are?"

There was a confused murmur of support from the others present.

"*I*," said the small blue figure, in a voice that pealed like a trumpet, "*I* come from the tomb, from the company of the mighty dead. And *my* age is three thousand six hundred years!"

There was an awesome silence.

Presently, in feeble tones, "Good-night, everybody," said the big lamp.

"One!" chimed the little French clock.

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# THE RIFLE

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# THE RIFLE

I DON'T know why this thing should have happened to me. It isn't as if I knew the man. I have never been in the Hedjaz and I know nothing of the activities of Lawrence and his band of desperadoes during the Great War except what I have read in newspapers and books. And yet, there you are! The thing occurred. Call it what you like. I may have been in a state that induced psychic phenomena or, again, I may have been just dreaming. I do have queer dreams at times, dreams that I cannot ascribe to any known cause. Anyway, it was, to say the least of it, somewhat odd. But let me give you the facts.

A dear old friend of mine—he's dead now. God rest him! He was a worthy citizen—presented me with a war-relic, a rifle, to be precise. He had a vague idea that it came from Gallipoli or some place like that, and his chief thought in giving it me was, as he unblushingly stated, to get rid of it. He had never used a firearm in his life and he had the firm conviction that the rifle in question was loaded and might, at any time, go off with a loud bang, thereby endangering his peace of mind and, possibly, some portion of

his anatomy. Knowing that I have an unholy liking for all death-dealing weapons, whether old or new, he came to the conclusion that I was indicated as the one to whom he might pass on his unwelcome guest. I accepted with enthusiasm, and at once, to his obvious unease, proceeded to examine what was to me a very interesting exhibit.

"H'm," said I, as I handled the rifle. "Like our own long Lee-Enfield, re-built. Safety-catch so—bolt action so—magazine tucked away here. Yes, everything quite in order." I slipped the safety-catch, shot the bolt back, loaded an imaginary cartridge and pressed the trigger. The rifle was in excellent working condition. I unhitched the bolt and squinted down the barrel. It was beautifully clean—not a speck of rust anywhere. I slid the bolt into place again and slung the butt to my shoulder. It cuddled up in the most delightful fashion.

"This is *some* gun," I said. "Give me an oily rag and, in five minutes, I'll guarantee to take her into action."

"Quite, quite," said my old friend. "But—er —not here, please."

I laughed and turned the rifle about in my hands. She really was a darling and I guessed that the man to whom she had originally belonged had loved her just as I loved my own old sporting Winchester. I ran my hand round the butt.

"Hello!" I said. "Now what's this?"

I examined more carefully the groove I had only vaguely noticed before. It ran from aft the trigger-guard with a slightly upward trend two-thirds of the way to the heel of the butt. It had a nasty look. I held the rifle loosely in my hands for a moment and then placed the butt once more to my shoulder. Then I dropped into the position for bayonet-fighting. My friend was watching me with some amusement. I grounded arms, rubbed my chin and did a bit of thinking. Then I held the rifle towards my friend, butt first, and said, "See that groove?"

"I do," he replied.

"Well," said I, "I'll bet you a level five piastres that the bullet that made that groove killed the lad who owned the rifle. I'll just show you how it would happen."

"I don't want to know anything about it," replied my friend very vigorously. "If you'll only take the blessed thing away I shall be more than satisfied. I hate having it in the place and I'm very sure I can dispense with any blood-curdling stories about it. I sleep quite badly enough as it is."

"Right oh!" I said with a grin. " 'Nuff sed! If you don't know a good thing when you see it, that's *your* funeral."

Accordingly I took the rifle home and, later in the day, gave it a thorough overhaul. It was

obviously of Turkish origin, whether made or just assembled in Turkey I could not be sure. There were Turkish characters on the metal guard where the bolt ran home, and my knowledge of Arabic enabled me to identify one or two words, notably the word for "arsenal," and also to check the various numbers on the adjustable backsight. But it was the groove in the butt that interested me most. I was almost certain that that groove could tell a grisly tale if it could only speak. I began to try to reconstruct, but was interrupted by the sudden arrival of my good lady. I hastily endeavoured to conceal the rifle—my wife has pronounced views on what she calls littering the house up—but in vain. Fixing a steely eye on the unoffending firearm she demanded, "What rubbish have you been bringing into the house now?"

I hastened to explain, and strove to placate the wrath to come by telling her that it was a present from old George, good old George, and I couldn't refuse without offending the old dear, now could I? But I didn't get away with it at all, alas!

"There are those two spears in the corner of your study," she said. "You've been going to put them on the wall for the last six months and they're still in the same old corner. Every time the room is turned out they have to be moved and put back again. And now, I suppose, you

think you're going to litter up another corner with that gun thing. Well, if you do, all I can say is——"

"My dear," I charged in, "the whole outfit shall be moved to-morrow. It's just a matter of deciding on the best place for them, you know. You wouldn't like me to spoil the effect of your lovely hall by putting stuff on the walls any old how, now would you?" (I thought that would get across. Not a bit of it!) The dear girl promptly countered with an ultimatum.

"If you haven't moved everything by to-morrow evening the dustman will get a present." And she tripped off to harry the soul of some other unfortunate—the cook, I suppose.

I looked at the corner where the spears were and, quite unconsciously, placed the rifle in the corner opposite. Then I'm blessed if I didn't forget all about it for three weeks!

I was reminded of its existence by a sinister incident. I came in earlier than usual one evening and found my suffragi busily gathering together spears and rifle preparatory to removing them from my study.

"Here, you," I said. "What's that you're doing?"

"The lady says," he answered mildly, "that I must put these spears and this gun in the dustbin. I hear and obey."

"Oh, indeed," said I. "Well, now, hear and

obey me. Put those things back where they were. I want them."

"Good!" he said philosophically and went off to report to the O.C.

In the meantime I thought feverishly and, when the cyclone arrived, I was protected at all points.

"I've got the whole scheme fixed up, darling," I shot out. "It's the only way. Come along and I'll explain."

I bustled her into the hall and babbled, "I'll put the spears here and the rifle just there. In that way they'll balance the Arab swords and the Damascus pistols. Then, if I just move this Rampur tulwar here and place that Tuareg dagger over there, it'll all look fine. What do *you* think?"

I concluded in my breeziest manner. She directed a baleful stare at me and rapped out, "Do IT NOW!"

"Now?" I faltered.

"Now!" came the inflexible retort, and, unheeding my carefully studied attitude of utter misery, she pattered away to bully someone else —the suffragi this time, I devoutly prayed.

Well, there was no reprieve. I just had to clamp the infernal things on the wall. I thought longingly of my easy-chair and the latest product of jolly old Edgar's nimble pen—I had left the heroine in a perfectly ghastly situation—but I said to myself, "Nunno! It *must* be done." So I

proceeded gloomily to fix up the spears to my satisfaction. This took some little time, and then I drove in a tentative nail in the wall at the spot I had designed for the lower support of the rifle. The nail went in for a quarter of an inch and then bent over at a depressing angle. I gave vent to an exasperated groan. I may say, at this point, that the walls of my flat were apparently constructed by the builders not simply for a period of years but for all time. From experience, I can vouch for the fact that they are composed of plates of chilled steel alternating with slabs of a cement that is even harder. I set off disgustedly to gather together my equipment of drills, plugs and hammers. I laid them neatly on the floor of the hall and then proceeded to fetch the rifle in order to measure it against the wall. I proposed to put it in an upright position, butt down, with one hook through the trigger-guard and another clipped over the barrel just below where the hilt of the bayonet clicks on.

I took the rifle out of its corner and sat down for a minute in my easy-chair. There was half an hour before I need think of changing for dinner and I felt that a spot of repose was quite in order before continuing my labours. I lighted a cigarette and, once again, began to examine the groove in the butt of the rifle. Then I laid the weapon across my knees and leaned back in the chair. The house seemed very quiet. I passed

a gentle finger-tip along the groove. "I wonder just what happened exactly," I said aloud.

. . . . . .

I was in the desert again. The time I reckoned, by a glance at the sun, was about 2 P.M. It was hot, oh Lord, how hot it was! That was my first impression. My second, as I looked round, was that this wasn't *my* desert. I had served with the Desert Column during the Great War and I knew perfectly well that this was a different desert altogether. In the first place, the strip of railway-line wasn't running the right way. Moreover, everything was in the wrong corner of the compass, so to speak.

"This is rum," I said to myself. "Now what am I doing here?"

I began to take in things. There was the usual perfect circle of sand—nothing between me and the sky-line except over to the N.W. where there was quite a useful rise in the ground, with a few palm trees tucked away to leeward.

"H'm," I muttered. "Oasis over there, evidently. Well, that's something, at all events. I can get a drink when I want it. And that railway-line has obviously been laid with an eye to the said oasis."

I looked around. There was the stereotyped rise and fall in the surface of the ground, the ill-defined variety of colour, a bit of scrub here and there, and the melancholy line of rail running

stark and straight through it all except where it took on a bit of a curve to approach the oasis. It was an aching scene of desolation, and I asked myself once again, "Where the devil am I, and why?"

The whole show was beginning to get on my nerves, and I decided that a drink from the almost inevitable well and a rest in the shade of some altruistic palm tree would adequately meet the situation. What I really wanted to do was to sit down and worry things out quietly. I took a step forward and immediately dropped and hugged the ground. I had seen something. In the desert when you see something you take cover first and investigate afterwards. That's why I promptly hit the earth in one piece.

Presently I raised a cautious head. A number of figures were creeping quietly out of a fold in the ground. They moved forward to the railway-line, each man bent almost double, and spread themselves along a distance of some twenty yards or so. They proceeded to do something which obviously entailed a certain amount of effort. I seemed to perceive a muffled clink every now and again. I chuckled. I knew, well enough, what they were at.

"Tearing the blinking track up," I said. "Same old game!"

Presently they began to drift back to their original position and I was able to see them

clearly. They were Bedouin and yet, somehow or other, they were not. They looked like Bedouin, they moved like Bedouin and yet—I'd got it! Their outfit was wrong. I turned the matter over in my mind for a moment and then light came.

"Thunder!" I gasped. "This must be the Hedjaz. Now what, in the name of all that's wonderful, am *I* doing in the Hedjaz?"

I could not provide an answer, so stayed where I was with every sense alert. I was absolutely certain within myself of what was going to happen and I was consumed with admiration of the diabolical strategy involved. I told you, didn't I, that the oasis was some small distance to the N.W.? The line had been cut about two hundred yards away from it. You see the idea, don't you? So near and yet so far, what? And I was prepared to bet my shirt that, within the next few minutes, I should see an armoured train crashing up from the South. Also, I knew instinctively that another band of free-lances was lying somewhere ready to tear up the track at the mouth of the trap once the unfortunate train had passed in. I was quite right. I saw a dirty rag flutter in the air, once, twice, and again, obviously a signal of some kind, and then the desert was empty, empty as it had been at the moment of creation! It was the most amazing display of taking cover I've ever seen, and I know what I'm talking about. I'm pretty hot at that

game myself. I prepared to wait. It seemed to me that I was in the front seats, so to speak, and I was quite ready to watch proceedings and then issue a critical report, if called upon to do so.

I kept my eyes glued on the track and, after what seemed to me to be about ten minutes, I spotted a slight lump on the southern rim of the horizon, just where the railway-line ran over the edge, and I felt in my bones that there was going to be big trouble.

The armoured train—I knew it would be an armoured train—came on at a good speed, and a picture flashed through my mind of the conditions prevailing in the interior thereof. The positively infernal heat in the steel trucks—every water-bottle empty in spite of stringent orders to the contrary—men sitting and standing around waiting for the welcome shout that the oasis was in sight—the earnest gaze of the look-out, desperately scanning the hopeless landscape for any sign of the enemy—the sliding doors partly open to admit some inrush of air that might cool the Gehenna within. Phew! What a life! It was hot in the desert but I hated to think what it must be like in that armoured train.

Aha! I leaned forward on my elbows. The train was pulling up. The crew had detected the gap in the track. Slam! went the steel doors and, in an instant, from every loophole poked the muzzle of a rifle. From the side of the leading truck the

nose of a machine-gun swung here and there for a moment and then was still. An ominous silence fell!

And now I seemed to be able to see beyond the train, for I perceived quite distinctly a score of Arabs, hidden by a slight dip in the ground, attacking the track in rear of the doomed outfit. Presently they faded out of the picture, and all was still again.

"And now, my lad," I cogitated, "what are you going to do?"

I was mentally addressing the officer in charge of the train. I knew quite well what he was thinking.

"Is it a trap or is it just a piece of frightfulness on the part of a bunch of roving Arabs? It's as hot as Hell in here and we're perishing for want of water. There are the wells, two hundred yards away. What about taking a chance?"

A sliding door opened gingerly a couple of inches or so. Nothing happened. It slammed violently and half a dozen rifles cracked from as many different loopholes. A very smart attempt to draw fire from a hidden enemy but—quite futile. There was no reply whatsoever. Silence resumed its sway over the scene.

"Clever, very clever," I muttered. "I wonder who's in charge of those Arabs. He's put the fear of God in them all right."

Presently three or four sliding doors moved

slowly and I could see vague figures in the openings. The supreme calm was unbroken. There was a sudden movement and a figure leapt from the train to earth and crouched like a cat. It was a Turkish officer.

"Stout feller!" I murmured.

Only for a moment he crouched and then he stood erect with head thrust forward towards the rolling surface of the desert. Presently he relaxed his strained attitude, as though satisfied that there was nothing to fear, and waved his hand. Men began to clamber out of the trucks. Headed by their officer they walked towards the gap in the track. One of them received an order and, taking the water-bottles eagerly offered by the others, began to walk towards the oasis what time the officer and his men bent over the track. He was some twenty paces away when I saw a puff of smoke lift itself from the desert. The man twisted violently round, the water-bottles went in all directions and he fell on his face.

"One!" I counted.

The members of the repair party were inside the train before I could wink; doors crashed; rifle-muzzles quivered; the train began to move backwards.

"And when you find the track torn up behind you what are you going to do then?" I asked the universe at large. I knew the answer all right. There could be only one answer. The men in

the train would be parched with thirst. Water they must have, and water they would come back for. And the Arabs knew it—and bided their time! I found myself wondering who was the psychologist in command of them. He must have had a perfectly horrible mind!

Not another shot was fired as the train steamed away.

"Well, of course," said I. "What's the sense of wasting ammunition?"

Some little time passed and I became aware that the train was coming back again. It clanked to a standstill. A door was flung open and a figure appeared. Another puff of smoke from the desert, the figure collapsed and the door banged to. But, in some mysterious way, I knew that it was only a tunic and head-dress fastened to a rifle that had been thrust through the opening, and that some hot-headed Arab had given the attacking party's position away. I could imagine the cursing he was getting from their leader.

"Now then," I muttered grimly. "Volunteers to fetch water."

Almost at once an intense fire was opened from the train. Rifles spat, machine-guns fussed and a hail of lead sprayed the ground occupied by the Arabs. An instant later and four doors were jerked open and as many men, hung about with water-bottles, leapt out of the train and raced for the oasis.

"That's the stuff!" I congratulated.

But I was somewhat premature. The four men were going strong when, from the desert, arose the ominous puffs of smoke, and each man swayed to the ground and remained still.

"Shootin'," I nodded.

The storm from the train redoubled in fury, and again four men leapt out. They met the same fate. A further attempt by two other gallants was checked in a similar way.

"And now what?" I demanded.

Eleven casualties, all dead too, if I knew anything about shooting, and nothing done. And this uncanny silence to follow. So far, not a sign of an Arab had been seen.

I could picture the state of affairs in the train. The hellish heat—the smoke from the rifles—the blackened faces of the men—the torturing thirst—the uncertainty as to the intentions of the enemy—the knowledge of the water near at hand and, above all, the overwhelming conviction that there was no escape.

"Poor devils," I muttered. "Poor, poor devils!"

And suddenly I was afraid, because I knew what was going to happen. If men, brave men, know they have to die, they will die in the open; they will not die like rats in a trap. But, oddly enough, here again I was a bit premature. Whether the Arabs got out of hand or whether

their O.C. deemed the critical moment had come I don't know, but suddenly there was a movement in the desert and a line of crouching figures ran forward to the train. A burst of fire greeted them, and I saw one or two of the advancing wave crumple up and fall motionless. At the same instant a door was flung open and an enormous soldier, festooned with water-bottles, appeared from within the train. In spite of his size he was as supple as a snake, and the instant he hit the ground he was off, twisting and turning and providing an impossible mark. He got well ahead of the bodies of his predecessors, and I was cheering him on when suddenly he flung out his hands and dropped. There must have been a pretty steady eye behind the sights of the rifle that got him!

I turned my eyes to the train. The fight was raging furiously. The Arabs, taking advantage of every scrap of cover, were advancing remorselessly. I wondered at their temerity in approaching what was, to all intents and purposes, an impregnable fort, but a feeling gradually stole over me that they *knew* something, that they were expecting something to happen and that they wanted to be there when it did happen. Even as I marvelled, the train belched forth men, maddened, thirst-racked men. I had a glimpse of their officer trying to beat them back with the butt of his revolver. I saw him go down, trampled

under foot, and then the rest was massacre. The train-crew fought blindly, recklessly, but once outside the protection of their steel walls they had no chance. They were outnumbered five to one and were picked off like sitting pheasants. The officer staggered groggily to his feet and blazed away manfully with his revolver, but he was soon killed. Presently the firing slackened; the smoke cleared. There was a rush of Arabs to the train. Horrid sounds arose here and there from within—the wounded being butchered, I suppose—and then silence once again. I closed my eyes for a space. When I opened them I saw a large group of men in flowing robes standing near the unhappy train and apparently discussing their next step. One, who seemed to be their leader, was giving instructions. Many quiet figures lay around and, for some reason or other, I was pleased to see that they were not all Turks. I looked carefully over the battlefield. Not a single Turk left alive!

"Annihilation," I muttered. "Absolutely."

And then I narrowed my eyes. That big fellow, the last of the water-seekers, had he moved? I concentrated my gaze upon him. He *was* moving. Now what the devil was he doing? I watched him like a cat watching a mouse. I saw him drag his bayonet, with infinite precaution, from its scabbard and fix it. Then, just as carefully, he slid back the bolt of his rifle,

thrust cartridges into the magazine, pushed home the bolt again and slowly, slowly raised himself on his elbows.

"Wow!" said I, very joyously. "Here beginneth the second lesson!"

The Arab leader was still giving orders when, without any warning, he collapsed as he stood. A little puff of smoke came from the position held by the big Turk. Another little puff of smoke and the man to whom the leader had been talking dived headlong to earth. I waited for the third shot but it did not come. The group of Arabs had disappeared and in its place were a few ill-defined patches of shadow on the ground. One patch shifted a little. Puff! The shadow remained—but a darker shadow crept beneath it.

"Go it, Johnny!" I urged, somewhat coarsely.

Once again a puff of smoke, but this time from the group of shadows. I saw my water-carrier give a convulsive jerk.

"Left shoulder," I decided sententiously.

Puff! Puff! Puff! Things were getting lively. They had got him ranged now to a nicety, and I could see that it was only a matter of time. He sent back shot for shot and I wondered admiringly how long he would stick it out. The shadows were moving stealthily after each shot, and I could see their idea. They were going to ring him round. Then there would be a short, sharp rush and so, good-night to my gallant Turk! But

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A GIGANTIC FIGURE TOWERED FROM THE SAND

that bright lad had ideas of his own on the subject, and squirmed, now right, now left, as the attacking line spread around him. It was a fight that was a real pleasure to watch, and my sympathies were all with the lone, lorn survivor.

And then the unexpected happened. He ceased to fire!

"Oh help!" I moaned. "His ammunition's run out!"

The circle of desert wolves realised it at the same moment as myself. There was a howl of glee and the long-robed figures rose to their feet. A flicker of steel and, knife in hand, they surged forward to the kill!

I sickened as I saw the onrush, and then my heart leapt into my throat as a gigantic figure towered from the sand, bayonet at the charge! Oh, he looked superb, the indomitable Turk! His head was bleeding—I reckon that first bullet had only creased him—and his left shoulder was a clotted mass; but he stood there, unafraid, unconquerable, the very incarnation of fight, a god amongst men!

The Arabs halted for a moment in amaze; then, with a yell, they swept forward once again, eager to have it over and done with. The Turk threw his head back and I saw, rather than heard, his deep-throated growl of "Allah!" And then, "Heavens!" I shrieked. "He's going to charge! Charging an army! Oh, WELL PLAYED, SIR!"

The great figure plunged forward. The sunlight danced on the bayonet as he shook his rifle exultantly towards the oncoming foe. His bulk seemed to me to increase as he came on; he towered higher and higher. Suddenly he gathered himself together, the bayonet fell into position and he broke into a short run. His throat moved again in the deep-seated growl, "Allah!" and, at that instant—oh, curse the skulking hound that fired the shot!—he faltered in his stride, stumbled, recovered himself, stumbled again and slowly sank to earth. A little wisp of smoke ran along the butt of his rifle!

. . . . . .

My wife was shaking me by the arm. There was a scent of burning wood in my nostrils. I looked down. A cigarette end was smouldering in the groove in the butt of the rifle that still lay across my knees.

"And what have you got to say for yourself?" demanded my irate spouse. "Here you are asleep. The dinner gong's gone. You've not even changed and that wretched gun is still not fixed to the wall."

She reached out to pull the rifle away from my knee, but I put my hand on it and said quietly, "Let be!"

When I talk like that the good lady generally falls silent. She looked at me curiously.

"Have you been dreaming again?" she asked.

"I dunno," I said rather doubtfully. "I'll tell you all about it at dinner."

I went and changed, but first I put the rifle very gently in its accustomed corner.

During the meal I told my wife what I had seen in my dream or vision, if you like to call it so. And, when the tale was ended, I stood up and looked to my front and held my glass aloft.

"To the bravest of the brave!" said I.

My wife rose to her shapely height and, in turn, raised her glass.

"I will add to that," said she. "To a very gallant gentleman!"

And there were tears in the dear girl's eyes.

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# THE TONGA-DRIVER

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# THE TONGA-DRIVER

## I

MORE years ago than I like to think about I was staying in Peshawar.

Peshawar lies at the foot of the Khyber Pass, which is one of the Gates of India, and is a somewhat important place for that reason.

The other day I read that a railway-line had been constructed from one end of the Khyber Pass to the other, that is, from Peshawar, through Jamrud, which is almost in the mouth of the Pass, past Ali Masjid, which lies midway through the Pass, to Landi Kotal, which is at the far end of the Pass. I suppose that, before long, people from Peshawar will go to Landi Kotal for the week-end or picnic in the hills around Ali Masjid. I'm sure I hope so.

But, in my time, things were somewhat different. In the first place, on my arrival at Peshawar, I found the one and only hotel full. I sought and obtained accommodation at the dak-bungalow, which is a sort of rest-house. The aged native who acted as cook and caretaker, after leading me to my room and enquiring about my needs, presented me with a

document which was, he said, to be filled in and signed by me. There were the usual questions as to name, address, business, nationality and so forth, but what particularly caught my eye was the enquiry, earnestly underlined, as to what address my effects should be sent to, in case of my *sudden death*.

I ate my dinner with the uncomfortable feeling that Peshawar was a town somewhat different from others I had visited. This feeling was intensified by the fact that three times during the night I was awakened by the unmistakable thud of a bullet striking the outer wall of the dak-bungalow. I had noticed that the cook had carefully shuttered all the windows before retiring for the night, and I now understood why.

The following morning I set out to gain information and was told, first, that anyone who went outside the town-limits at night did so at his own risk; second, that the hillmen had the unpleasant habit of lying out at night and shooting at any lighted window; third, that certain parts of the town should be visited with caution by Europeans; and, fourth, that, if I did not die in any other way, I should certainly be killed by the bad cooking of the caretaker of the dak-bungalow.

After thinking over these four valuable items of news, I decided that Peshawar was, after all, an interesting place, and resolved to look round

a bit. So I forthwith paid a visit to that part of the town which had been described to me as being an unhealthy spot for Europeans. I came away with the firm impression that the information given me was correct. Probably a somewhat exciting five minutes with an Afridi, about seven feet high and four feet broad, helped me to come to this conclusion. He was a nasty-tempered fellow and carried a peculiarly ugly-looking knife at his belt. I could not help thinking that he would be much better in a cage with, say, one or two other tigers. Our interview was brief, and concerned itself with the question as to who should make way for the other. East met West, so to speak, and neither would give way. There was a tense moment when it seemed as though the fist might be called upon to move a shade more quickly than the knife, but the sense of humour, which is the privilege of both East and West, came to the rescue, and a feeling of bitter hostility instantaneously changed to one of the extremest good-fellowship. We actually shook hands before we parted, after an amazing display of politeness on both sides, and, to this day, I feel glad that I met that Afridi. He was a real man. I often wonder what he thought about me.

I was pondering over the matter when I went to call on the Political Agent the next day to extract information from him as to the possibility of

going up the Khyber Pass. I had been told that one of the most interesting sights on earth was the meeting of the eastward and westward-bound caravans at Ali Masjid, in the centre of the Pass, and I was particularly anxious to see it. As I passed through the Agent's compound I was stared at and scowled at by a lot of hairy-looking ruffians in dirty white robes and turbans, who were squatting there in an attitude of ferocious expectancy. I paid them the compliment of staring and scowling at them in return, with good interest.

The Political Agent was a courteous gentleman, who at once told me that I could go up the Pass on Tuesday or Friday, those being the only two days when the caravans passed through. On those two days the Pass was guarded by detachments of the regiment called the Khyber Rifles, whose business it was to see that the caravans were not attacked by the hillmen, who would have been only too pleased at an opportunity to do a little fighting and a great deal of plundering. As Tuesday was the next day, this suited me very well, and I expressed my appreciation. Incidentally, I asked for information about the ruffians in the compound. I was told that they were representatives of the Zakka Kheyl tribe, who were present for the purpose of receiving the money paid to them by the Indian Government as a reward for being good.

"What is meant exactly by being good?" I asked.

"Oh," said the Political Agent, "abstaining from raiding other tribes and making war against the Government."

"And does it work?" I asked.

"Generally," he replied, "but, if the crops have been abundant and the young men are restless, we know what to expect. They cannot keep quiet for too long at a stretch, and so we have, on occasion, to employ other means."

"Exactly," I agreed, thinking of the detachments of the Khyber Rifles in the Pass.

As I walked back to the dak-bungalow I wondered whether I ought to provide myself with a machine-gun or a battle-axe as some small protection on the morrow. I came finally to the conclusion that a walking-stick and a winning smile might, after all, be the most effective means of keeping my skin in one piece.

I made arrangements with a tonga-driver of the town to take me up the Pass the next day. A tonga is a two-wheeled cart drawn by a small but wiry pony. The driver and passenger sit side by side, and so conversation becomes inevitable.

We set out in good time the next morning, and at once the journey became full of interest. From Peshawar to Jamrud the road was fairly level, and so I had a good view of the fort and the desolate region around it. It did not impress

me as being at all a pleasant sort of district. Very soon we approached the Pass, and I could see the road winding through it along which the caravan must travel. As we actually entered the Pass my first thought was that I had never seen such grim-looking scenery. On each side rose bare, gaunt, forbidding hills; from them boulders had rolled into the valley, and here and there we had to drive carefully to avoid an upset. The general colour-scheme was brown and grey, not the gracious, kindly brown and grey that one gets on an English moor, however, but a harsh, rusty brown and a cold, steely grey. One felt that the hills were pitiless, and that any race of people that could win a living from them would be equally pitiless. As we drove along I voiced this thought to the tonga-driver. He was a grave-looking man of middle-age, but his bright eyes and hooked nose indicated that in his youth he might not have been quite so grave.

"The men who live in these hills must be a hard race," I said.

"Sahib," he replied, "they are bad men."

His eyes smouldered as he spoke, and I said, "You speak bitterly. Have you suffered at their hands?"

"Sahib, if you wish to hear, I will tell you a story," he replied.

"By all means," I said.

"One night two years ago," he began, "I was

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"WHERE IS YOUR MONEY?"

asleep in my house after a hard day's work. I was awakened by the crash of the door being forced open. In an instant four men were in the room. Before I could move, three of them had flung themselves upon me and held me down on my bed. Two of them held my arms and the third sat on my feet. The fourth man, the leader, lighted a candle, put it on a box, and said roughly, 'Where is your money?'

"I replied, 'I have no money. I am a poor man.'

"He said, 'You lie. Where is yo money?'

"I said, 'I have no money.'

"He turned to the man who was holding my right arm and said, 'Stretch forth his arm.' The man did so, and the leader drew his knife and cut the sinews of my right wrist. My right hand was now useless. Again he said, 'Where is your money?' and I replied, 'I have no money.'

"Then he said to the man who was holding my left arm, 'Stretch forth his arm.' The man did so, and he severed the sinews of my left wrist. My left hand was now useless.

"Then he said, 'Turn him over on his face,' and his men did so. Then he laid the blade of his knife across the back of my right knee and said, 'Where is your money?'

"I thought swiftly. My wrists might become well again, but I knew my legs never could do so if once the sinews were cut. The savings of

ten years were in the little iron box, buried in the ground beneath my bed. But what is the use of money if it makes one a cripple? The leader raised the knife from my leg, and I cried quickly, 'Enough! Dig under the bed in such a place.'

"The three men still held me while their leader dug for the box. He found it, broke it open and said, 'Is this all?' I said, 'It is all,' and I cursed him. He laughed and said to his men, 'Let him go.' They did so and the four of them went out laughing. But before he did so, the leader threw the knife on the box, and said, 'Here is a knife for you, O man with useless hands.'

"I was three months in hospital before my wrists were fit for use, but they will never be quite right again. Look, Sahib." He stretched out his wrists, and I saw the puckered scar across each.

"The devils," I muttered.

"They are bad men, these hillmen," he said quietly.

"But," I exclaimed, "of course, you informed the authorities. There is a police-force here, I suppose."

"Sahib," he answered, "I told the police that I could not recognise the men, and so they could do nothing. That pleased me very well."

"But," I insisted, "such men ought to be hanged. It was a terrible thing to do. Why on

earth were you pleased that the police could do nothing?"

"Sahib," he said quietly, "it was not an affair for the police. It was *my* affair. I am of the Afridi people, and we take vengeance in our own fashion. When the leader of the four men cut my wrists he moved the candle so that he might see more clearly to do his butcher's work. And so I saw his face. He had a scar, shaped like a crescent moon, on his right cheek-bone. One day I shall see him again. He is not in Peshawar, I know, and so, every time I come with people up the Pass to watch the caravans go by, I look out for him. When I find him I shall show him my wrists and I shall say softly, 'O thief who came in the night, do you remember?' "

"And then?" I said.

"And then," he went on, in a singularly gentle voice, "we shall see what he can do when he is *not* helped by three other men."

As he finished speaking he took the reins in his left hand and made a curiously swift movement with his right. As though by magic an evil triangular-bladed knife appeared in his hand.

"Is that the knife?" I asked, as I eyed it apprehensively.

"That is the knife, Sahib," he murmured, and concealed it as mysteriously as he had brought it forth.

"I almost think I should like to be present at that meeting," I said thoughtfully. He turned his eyes on me and, for a moment, seemed to look right through to the back of my head. "It is in my mind that you will be, Sahib," he replied, and there was conviction in his voice.

## II

We drove on and presently began to overtake the outgoing or westward-bound caravan. It had started off from Peshawar long before us, and its leading camels were already well on towards the centre of the Pass. I was not very much interested in this particular caravan. It was the incoming caravan I wanted to see, the one that had been gathered together from every town in Central Asia.

As we drove up to Ali Masjid the advance camels of this great Central Asian caravan came into sight and, very soon, the whole extraordinary collection was spread out before my eyes. On the other side of the Pass the Indian caravan had halted, and men were streaming over to meet friends and relations in the caravan that was coming towards me. The tonga-driver had placed his tonga and pony in a spot withdrawn from the main path, and was standing, in a pensive attitude, watching the oncoming procession. It was really a remarkable sight.

There were hundreds of camels, not the ordinary dromedary type, but great two-humped, long-haired creatures that looked as big as elephants. Their loads were enormous, but they stepped along with ease. Cattle lumbered along, and sheep and goats pattered in and out of the ranks of the bigger beasts with complete unconcern. Here and there was a string of likely-looking ponies brought into India by some enterprising horse-dealer who hoped to make a big profit by selling them to polo-players. Scores of mules and donkeys were to be seen, many of the latter bearing female riders who were covered from head to foot in a long white garment that simply bore two small openings through which the concealed woman might look at the scene around her. They seemed more like ghosts than living creatures.

But it was the men accompanying this motley collection of goods and animals who mostly drew my attention. They were of all shapes, colours and sizes. I should imagine that there were representatives of every country in Asia to be found in their ranks. The great majority, of course, came from places like Khiva, Bokhara, Kabul and Kandahar, and bore a pronounced resemblance to the ferocious-looking specimens I had seen in the Political Agent's compound at Peshawar. Moreover, every man was, as we say, armed to the teeth. I remember one man, in

particular, who wore a belt that supported a sword on the one side and a heavy pistol on the other. He carried a bandolier of cartridges over each shoulder and a rifle, in addition, slung over the right. In his hand he swung a heavy riding-whip. As he passed by me I noticed with astonishment that, in spite of the weight of armament he was carrying, he trod as lightly as a deer. Some of the caravan men seemed to me not to have seen a white man before, for they came up to me and stared at me quite frankly as though I were some strange wild animal. Two or three men, from the Khyber Rifle post near by, were standing about, and I asked one of them where these men came from and what they were. He was explaining as well as he could when I experienced a most curious sensation in the small of my back. It seemed to go cold, so to speak. I whirled round and the first thing I saw was the muzzle of a huge pistol pointing now straight at my stomach. It was in the hands of a wild-looking fellow who was, apparently, explaining to two or three equally wild-looking friends of his just how it worked! Now, I hate to have pistols pointed at me. They have a nasty habit of exploding when you least expect it. So I walked forward to the lecturer, and reached out my hand for the pistol with a smile, just as he was showing them how the trigger was used. As I expected, the pistol was loaded in every chamber!

The man looked at me with a scowl, and I said in Hindustani, "O brother, that is not the best way to hold the pistol. Give it me and I will show you how to make sure that you hit the mark when you fire." He did not quite understand, but the Khyber Rifleman, who had followed me, added a word or two, and his face at once cleared as he passed the pistol to me.

"Now," said I, handling the weapon, "the butt should be held thus, the first finger placed thus, and the second finger on the trigger thus." He was vastly interested and came to my side to get a better view. Quite a little circle had gathered round by this time, and all were looking at me with pronounced respect. Even the Khyber Rifleman was impressed!

"It is true, Sahib," said the owner of the pistol. "Now when I fire at something twenty yards away I often miss, but if I hold it in the way the Sahib shows, my aim will be more steady. Fire one or two shots, Sahib, so that we may see the new way in use."

I was now in a bit of a difficulty, because I knew that, once shooting begins, even innocent shooting, in a place like the Khyber Pass, various things may happen. So I played for time to think out a way of escape.

"What shall I aim at?" I asked. "Oh," he said grandly, pointing to a very large camel that stood a few yards away, "shoot at that camel." "But,"

I expostulated, "is it your camel?" "No," he said calmly.

I must have looked my amazement, for a perfect roar of laughter went up from the men around. Others came up to learn the joke, and soon there were twenty or thirty men laughing at the idea of the Sahib shooting another man's camel just to try a pistol. They thought it was a great joke. One man, in particular, drew my attention by his loud guffaws. He had a very sinister expression of face and looked horrible as he laughed. As his face straightened a bit, after one paroxysm, I noticed that he had a scar under his right eye, just over the cheek-bone, a scar shaped like a crescent moon!

Involuntarily I stepped back a pace. A picture flashed through my mind—a picture of a brute, holding a cruel knife, bending over a helpless man held down on a bed by three other ruffians and saying, as he moved the candle a little, "Stretch forth his arm!"

I looked hard at the man, who was now beginning to scowl at me for staring at him. A dull feeling of anger stole over me, and my fingers twitched round the pistol I was still holding. At that instant there was a movement at my side, and the tonga-driver stepped forward and walked straight up to the man with the scar.

He held out his hands and said softly, "O thief who came in the night, do you remember?" The

wrists were upwards, and the sun shone on the puckered scars. I saw the look of fear spring in the man's eyes. I saw him make an irresolute movement as though to draw some weapon, and then he whirled round to flee, coward that he was. The tonga-driver leapt forward and, as he moved, I saw his right hand raised high. In it he gripped the dreadful triangular-bladed knife.

"Dog!" he grunted, and the knife fell. It struck the fleeing man straight and true between the shoulder-blades, and he went down like a tree, flat on his face. His heart must have been split in two!

The tonga-driver bent over him and calmly cleaned his knife on the fallen man's garments. Then he stood erect and looked at the crowd. There was a mutter of anger, but I was standing stiffly beside my tonga-driver, the pistol prominently to the fore, and the Khyber Rifleman was handling his rifle suggestively. The crowd thought better of it and fell silent. The soldier turned to the tonga-driver and said, "O Dad Khan, was it the man?" And the tonga-driver said, "It was the man." "You have waited a long time," said the Rifleman. "Not too long," replied the tonga-driver. "Tell the story to these men," said the soldier, "so that, if there be any here who were his friends, they may know why he died."

So, standing there, with the knife in his hand,

Dad Khan, as I now knew him to be called, told his story. At the end, there was a little silence, and then he held out his wrists for the crowd to see. Many heads wagged, and the man to whom the pistol belonged stepped forward and said to the tonga-driver, "Brother, it was well done."

I handed him his pistol and turned to the soldier with a question in my eyes. He nodded and said to Dad Khan, "O Dad Khan, we know what we know. But the Government says that this is murder." He laid a hand on the tonga-driver's shoulder and said, "In the name of the Government." Dad Khan held out the knife to him without a word.

The Rifleman spoke to a brother-soldier, and then we all three walked to the tonga. Dad Khan hitched up the pony and drove us back in silence to Peshawar. I never even looked back at the famous caravan. At the dak-bungalow I descended, paid to Dad Khan the money I owed him, with a liberal tip, and then I held out my hand to him. The Rifleman watched me curiously.

"Sahib," said the tonga-driver, "my hand is red."

I remembered the way my finger had twitched on the pistol-trigger, and replied quietly, "But for the mercy of God, *my* hand had been red also. I recognised the man at the same moment as yourself, and the pistol was in my hand."

"Was it indeed so, Sahib?" he murmured softly, and we shook hands.

"Go with God," I said, but he drove off without a word, the Rifleman sitting erect by his side.

I slept ill that night. The next morning the cook-caretaker told me that a soldier wished to see me. I went on the verandah, and the Khyber Rifleman clicked to attention as I stepped out.

"I go back to duty, Sahib," he said, "but first I have a message from Dad Khan. He says, 'Let the Sahib know that I saw how he stood forward when the crowd muttered in the Pass. He is a man. I would have him remember me; therefore, I send him this.'" The soldier, on the word, laid a long, flat parcel in my hand, carefully wrapped in cloth. Before I opened it I knew what it was. It was the knife in its wooden sheath, bright, gleaming, as though it had never been used. I laid it on the table and said, "Tell Dad Khan that I accept his gift in the spirit in which he sends it, and that I wish him well. What will happen to him?"

"There will be a short time in prison," said the soldier, "but that is all. When the Great One asked Dad Khan why he had done this thing he told him the story that we all know."

"But why is there such a small punishment?" I asked.

"Sahib," said the soldier, "he showed the Great One his wrists."

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# THE WHISTLER

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# THE WHISTLER

## I

JULES BOLDEVIN was a good-for-nothing. His father said so; his mother said so; his elder brother said so; his younger sister said so. And, in addition, everybody else said so. Jules himself held quite a different opinion. As he pointed out, with exemplary patience, to his exasperated father, on the occasion of his dismissal from his seventh situation, he could not be held responsible for the bad temper of his employers.

"How is it," stormed his father, a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War, and not given to mincing his words, "how is it, triple imbecile, that all *your* employers have bad tempers?"

"Father," said Jules, with manly frankness, "I do not know."

"Nor does anyone else," shouted the old man. "The truth is you are idle. You hate good, steady, honest work."

"It is true that I hate work," said Jules reflectively, "but I am not idle. I think a great deal."

"So, undoubtedly, does an ass," replied his father, with heavy sarcasm. And then, abruptly, "Why were you dismissed to-day?"

"Well," said Jules, with a disarming smile, "the patron came into the workshop and found all his men standing round me."

"And why," demanded his father, "why, in the name of Heaven, were they standing round *you*?"

"I was whistling," replied Jules.

"You were *what*?" gasped the old man.

"Whistling," said Jules, "like this." He pursed up his lips, and a veritable flood of rollicking melody burst forth. It was a gay dance-tune that he was whistling, and the old man unconsciously began to beat time with his foot and nod his head to the music that reminded him of his youth. Becoming suddenly aware of the amused look on his son's face, he jumped to his feet and, shaking his fist at him, shouted, "Stop that noise, good-for-nothing! Is this house a theatre? Take your whistling outside, and see if it will earn a living for you. I will find you no more situations." He stamped out of the room, and Jules, watching him go, said to himself, "That is a good idea, father, a very good idea."

The next day the members of the Boldevin family were horrified to hear that Jules had been seen standing in the market-place selling copies of popular songs. The good lady who had seen him told the story with dramatic force.

"There he was, my poor friends, surrounded by a crowd of people. He held up a copy of a

song thus!" She lifted an imaginary sheet of paper. "Then he proceeded to whistle the air. The people listened and presently two or three began to sing. When all were singing, he stopped whistling and conducted the concert with his hand thus!" She waved her right hand about vaguely. "Then he went round and sold ten or, maybe, twenty copies of the song."

With one accord her hearers turned to see the effect created on Papa Boldevin. That worthy citizen was becoming purple in the face. His eyes bulged as he demanded savagely, "You are sure, Madame, that it was my son you saw?"

"But of course," replied the lady. "He addressed me by name, and tried to sell me a love-song; *me*, a married woman with five grown-up children. What, I ask you, have I to do with love-songs?"

"Ah," murmured Mamma Boldevin sympathetically.

"Good!" announced the old man. "This is the end. I have suffered enough. To-night he leaves my house." He rose to his feet and walked ponderously out of the room, leaving the others to discuss to the last thread this most recent enormity of the erring Jules.

When Jules came home that evening the family was sitting in a solemn silence awaiting him. Papa Boldevin wore an air of the most inflexible determination; Mamma Boldevin was

undisguisedly tearful, and the younger members of the family were alternately curious as to what would happen and virtuously indignant with the cause of all the trouble. Jules came in whistling cheerily, slammed the door, threw his cap at the cat, tripped over his mother's work-basket and finally fell heavily into a chair. He heaved a deep sigh.

"I really am very tired," he said. "What about supper?"

"You will get no supper here," announced his father, in a stony voice.

"Eh? What?" demanded Jules, in a shocked tone. "No supper? Why?"

"Why?" shouted Papa Boldevin. "Why? After disgracing me and your mother as you have done this day, you ask why? I will tell you why. You are a good-for-nothing, a worthless one, a dirty rascal who whistles in the streets all day long, and then comes home to a respectable house and asks for supper. Supper! Unless you are out of this house in five minutes my foot shall give you supper!"

Mamma Boldevin sobbed aloud, and Jules' brother and sister looked rather scared as the old man got menacingly to his feet.

Jules was quite unmoved by his father's outburst. "But, father, I only did what you ordered. You told me to take my whistling outside, and see if it would earn a living for me, so I did. I

think it will, too. It was a very good idea of yours, father."

The old man was furious. "What!" he thundered. "You dare to sit there and tell me that *I* am responsible for your evil actions. Earn a living! Do you call the miserable sous that you collect from the charitable and the imbecile a living? You think that you can argue with me in my own house! I will show you!" and he prepared to hurl himself upon Jules. Mamma Boldevin shrieked and flung herself between the two, begging Jules to be silent. That young man was, however, not so easily silenced. He stood up and put the table between his father and himself.

"Now look here, father," he said. "Be calm! When I say it was a very good idea of yours, I mean it. It is the best thing I have ever heard of. Behold!" He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins. He emptied the second pocket, the contents going to swell the heap made by those of the first in the middle of the table. Without paying any more attention to his infuriated parent he began to count the money.

"Nineteen francs and thirty, forty, fifty centimes," he announced. "Not bad for two or three hours' amusement! Nineteen fifty, yes, and in my last situation I worked from eight in the morning to eight at night six days a week for

twenty francs! A good idea that of yours, father, a very good idea. Now, what about supper?"

There was no answer. Everyone was staring at the heap of coins in the middle of the table.

"Supper!" repeated Jules plaintively.

"Oh, do stop talking about supper, you idiot," cried his sister. "Do you mean to say that you have made nearly twenty francs in one day selling songs?"

"*And* whistling them," corrected Jules.

"But are the people of this town mad?" gasped his brother.

"Oh no," said Jules, "not at all. Unlike some people I know, they appreciate talent."

"Talent! Did you say talent?" enquired his brother sarcastically.

"I said talent," replied Jules imperturbably. "Can *you* whistle? Of course you can't. And I will tell you something that will surprise you. There are not five men in this town who can, and, even if there were, they could not whistle as I do. The people are already beginning to speak of me as 'the professor,' " he concluded proudly.

"Professor, indeed," said his sister. "A fine professor you will look when people are tired of your famous song. Where will your twenty francs a day be then?"

"And has France only *one* song?" enquired Jules sweetly. "I assure you, my dear——"

"*Will* you be silent, you chattering ape?" burst out the old man. But it was noticeable that, in spite of his language, the anger had gone out of his voice. He was a Norman peasant by origin, and a heap of money to such a one is among the most blessed sights on earth.

"Now, listen to me. Tell me the truth. Did you steal this money?"

"If you think, father, that I stole it, the best thing for you to do is to come to-morrow and watch me steal some more. I have a new song. Paris has gone mad over it. If I don't make thirty or forty francs to-morrow, kick me out!" Jules was, for him, quite serious.

Mamma Boldevin whispered something in her husband's ear. Her eyes shone as she looked at the money on the table.

"But the disgrace," insisted the old man. "*My* son whistling in the market-place, and I a veteran of '71."

"Disgrace nothing!" said Jules. "It's no disgrace to get an honest living. Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get a false moustache or blacken my face or something so that people will not recognise me. Or, if you like, I'll clear off to another town where no one knows me."

The atmosphere was changing in the most remarkable way. Jules' last suggestion was met by a distinct murmur of disapproval although his father still looked grim.

"Right you are, then," said Jules. "Let it be a false moustache. And what about supper?"

This time there was no delay. Jules carelessly swept the money into a small bag and placed it on a shelf, his father's eyes following him avariciously. During supper the old man seemed to be pondering over some important matter and said little, but, when the meal was over, he settled himself in his arm-chair and reached out for his long clay pipe. When he had got it filled and lighted to his satisfaction he grunted good-humouredly, "Now then, good-for-nothing, let us hear this famous song that has set all Paris singing."

Jules sat down, placed his feet on another chair, put his head back and began to whistle. In two minutes the old man was beating time with his pipe, Mamma Boldevin was nodding delightedly, and Jules' brother and sister were humming like steam-engines!

"Well?" said Jules, when he had whistled the last few notes. His father reared up on his feet, pipe in hand. "My boy," he said, his face shining with enthusiasm, "if that song doesn't fetch you *fifty* francs to-morrow, I'll break my pipe!" And he promptly stumped off to bed, making weird noises in his throat as he went. Jules looked carefully at the table to see if there were, by some unexpected chance, any supper left.

II

Jules had not exaggerated when he said that Paris had gone mad over the new song. He might, indeed, have said that all France had done the same thing. "Ninette," as the song was called, was one of those songs that sweep like a storm through a country from time to time. Pretty words voicing a simple sentiment set to a catchy tune, it swung into popularity as soon as it appeared. It was sung at every music-hall, played at every café, and hummed unconsciously by every citizen and citizeness of the great Republic.

The appearance of Jules in the market-place next day with a great bundle of copies of the song under his arm was the signal for a large gathering of enthusiasts. He soon got to work.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I have here the song that is making history at this moment. I do not ask you to buy it. All you have to do is to listen to me while I whistle it. Thus you will learn the tune. Of course I cannot whistle the words. That is very unfortunate, as the words are very pretty. Still, they are all here," and he patted the bundle, "and, if you would really like to have a copy, well, the price is only a miserable two sous. I can see that you are anxious for me to begin. Now, listen!" and off he went into the gay, lilting air that had affected his father so powerfully the previous evening. The effect was

immediate: there was an instant demand for copies of the song, and very soon Jules was conducting an impromptu concert with one hand, and busily receiving money with the other. Presently there was a slight halt in the buying, and Jules at once began to push his wares.

"Aha, Mademoiselle," he said to a girl in the crowd who had not purchased a copy, "you with the laughing eyes, I mean; are you going home without a copy of this truly magnificent song? Shame on you to be so unkind to one who has for long loved you in secret," and he smote himself on the breast with a great look of sadness. The crowd laughed as the blushing girl threw down her two sous and picked up a copy. Jules swung round on a stolid-looking young man who was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking vacantly about him.

"Ohé, Monsieur," he cried, "will you let mademoiselle your fiancée go without a little gift from her sweetheart?"

"I have no fiancée," growled the young man.

"Buy a copy of this song," retorted the wily Jules. "Sing it as you go along the street, and every pretty girl you meet will want to be your fiancée!"

He turned his attention to a fat, comfortable-looking dame with a jolly, red face who was smiling largely at his remarks.

"Alas, Madame," he complained, "you that

are still beautiful in spite of the attacks of that villain, Time, you have no need of love-songs to attract the men. Still, buy a copy in the name of charity!"

One by one he singled out various members of the crowd and chaffed them into buying, which, for the most part, they were quite ready to do. He was doing a roaring trade, and the fifty francs prophesied by Papa Boldevin began to look extremely probable.

Presently he saw a tall young fellow, rather thin in the face, wearing a grey cap, a grey suit and a grey overcoat. Student was written all over him, and his English origin was plain. He was listening very intently to Jules' remarks and looked thoughtful. Jules kept his eye on him, and noted that he applauded vigorously whenever he whistled, and always demanded an encore.

"Oho," thought Jules. "This is one of the rich English milords I have heard about. I must get him to buy a copy or two." He raised his voice and called to the young fellow, "I see you, Grey Wolf, standing there. Have you come to buy or just to hear me whistle? If the latter, it will cost you five francs. It would be cheaper to take two or three copies. You can give them to your friends, you know," and he waved the sheets of paper in the air.

The student laughed. "Tell me why you call

me Grey Wolf," he said, "and I'll take five copies."

"Thin face, no moustache, bright eyes, strong jaws, grey covering," chanted Jules. "What more do you want?"

"Good enough!" cried the other. "Take the money!" and, packing the five copies of the song under his arm, he walked away laughing. Jules forgot all about him in the next few minutes, but he would have been surprised to know that the student was thinking about him all the way to his lodgings. Not only that but, when he got there, he sat down at his writing-table and began a letter of which the subject was Jules, his wonderful whistling and quick-fire conversation. The letter ended, "And so, my dear uncle, if you take my advice, you will pay a flying visit to this town, and see and hear the man yourself. I am quite sure that he is the exact type you want for your new play." He put the letter in an envelope which he addressed to Paris to an actor-manager there whose name was known throughout France.

Two or three days later Jules was hard at work in the market-place, whistling and holding forth in his usual cheery way to the crowd of people around him. It was market-day, and numbers of the country-folk had come in from the outlying villages and were combining business with pleasure. Jules was doing very well

and, as success always acts as a powerful stimulant, was whistling and talking even better than usual. He rallied the stolid Norman peasantry around him, picking out special types here and there, and making witty, good-natured comments on their appearance that invariably led up to a pointed remark that extracted the necessary two sous in return for a copy of the song of the moment. "Ninette" was the great favourite, of course, but there was quite a brisk sale for other songs that appealed to the simple folk around.

He was leaning forward to attract the attention of one member of the crowd when he perceived the tall English student, still clad in grey, standing by the side of a smaller, older man who was encased in a fur coat. Both were listening carefully to his utterances, and there was a pleased look on the older man's face.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo," said Jules, in his most jovial tones. "There you are again, Grey Wolf! You have come for another five copies, I hope. And how many will Grizzly Bear, your friend, take? He looks a strong man. He could carry ten. Now then, which song would you like to hear?" The older man named a dance-tune and said, "Do you know that?"

"But of course," said Jules. "I can whistle anything you like to name."

"Perhaps," smiled the so-called Grizzly Bear,

"you can and perhaps you cannot. You shall whistle this tune and another, and then I will take the ten copies you mention."

"Done!" cried Jules, and forthwith began to whistle. To his disgust both the student and the man in the fur coat seemed to be watching the people around rather than himself. These latter, provided with a free entertainment, were following the tune delightedly; here and there feet were tapping and bodies swaying as the perfect timing of the dance rippled through the music. Jules brought his performance to an end with an exquisite little trill. The man in the fur coat nodded his head and said, "Not at all bad! Now this," and he named another air, an old and well-known marching-tune. "Aha!" said Jules. "Now we join the Army, do we? Very well! Here we go!" and immediately plunged into the famous quick-step. Again he noticed that he was not the centre of attention to the two strangers. They were once more watching the people. The effect of the new tune was obvious on those standing around. The eyes of the women were shining; the backs of the men were straightening, and presently heavy boots began to hit the ground, tramp, tramp, tramp! Then an ancient citizen, an old fighting-man by the look of him, commenced to growl the words of the tune in a deep, bass voice, and immediately the whole crowd was singing with hearty good-will. Jules shrugged

his shoulders despairingly, ceased to whistle, and conducted the performance with both hands until it came to an end.

The man in the fur coat came forward for his ten copies, took and paid for them, and said to Jules, "When you have finished here I should like to talk to you. Come and see me at this address," and he scribbled the name of an hotel on the back of one of the copies of the song which he returned to Jules.

"With pleasure," answered Jules, "and for whom am I to ask?"

The man in the fur coat smiled slyly and said, "Grizzly Bear!" Then he and the student walked away.

Ahmed Mohiuddin Gator
(Shopian)

III

Jules finished his day's work and then proceeded to the hotel named by the man in the fur coat. On arrival, he calmly asked for Monsieur Grizzly Bear. The reception-clerk gravely informed him that the gentleman was in his room, and was expecting him. He then conducted Jules to the particular room and left him. Jules knocked at the door. A voice bade him enter and he went in to find both his acquaintances of the morning sitting there.

"Ah, there you are!" said the older man, who, no longer enveloped in his fur coat, seemed not

such a likely subject for chaff as he had been in the morning. "Pray sit down. First of all, do you know who I am?"

"No, Monsieur," said Jules respectfully.

"Well," went on the other, "I am ——" and he gave a name that made Jules sit up apprehensively in his chair.

"Oh, Monsieur," he said remorsefully, "and I called you Grizzly Bear in the face of all the people."

"That, my friend," said the great actor-manager, "is one reason why you are here. It exactly expressed my appearance, just as Grey Wolf is the best name you could have chosen for my nephew here. He looks precisely like a grey wolf in that suit and coat of his. I wonder I never thought of it myself. Well, now, let us talk business. You must know that I am about to produce a new play. Now it is essential that one of the characters in the play should be able to whistle, and whistle well; he is supposed to be a street-hawker and fills in his time by selling his goods and whistling. So far I have not been able to find just the kind of man required, and I was in despair when I got a letter from my nephew telling me he thought he had found the man I wanted. I came to see you and listen to you, and I am practically sure you are the very man for the part.

"But," cried the astounded Jules, "I cannot

act. I have never been on the stage in my life. I should be a failure, Monsieur."

"I don't want you to act," said the other placidly. "All I require is that you should walk on the stage, and do what you did this morning. There will be certain definite types among the stage crowd—we'll have a Grizzly Bear and a Grey Wolf there, if you like—and you can make up your patter as you go along just as though you were in the market-place."

Jules, who had had terrible visions of putting on false whiskers and learning hundreds of lines of poetry by heart, began to look more cheerful.

"I think I could do that," he said, "if that is all you require, Monsieur. For how long would you want me?"

"Well," smiled the other, "one can never be absolutely sure how a play will be received, of course, but, now that I have found you, my cast is, I consider, as good as anything I have collected up to the present. The play is excellent. Yes, I think we may expect a year's run."

"A year!" said Jules. "Good! And, excuse me, Monsieur, what would the salary be?"

The actor-manager rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"The success of the play will, to a certain extent, depend on you," he said. "I am prepared to sign a contract offering you, if you can play the part, two hundred francs a week."

Jules shot out of his chair. "P-p-pardon me, Monsieur," he stammered. "Wh-what did you say?"

"Two hundred francs a week," repeated the other calmly.

Now, Jules was no fool. He knew very well that the income derived from his market-place work was very precarious. A few rainy days and it would dwindle to nothing a week. In those days—before the Great War had altered values—a franc was a franc and two hundred francs represented eight solid English pounds. He picked up his hat. "When do I begin, Monsieur?" he asked.

"Gently, gently," laughed the other. "I see you have decided. Come round to-morrow morning, and I will have the contract all ready for you to sign. In the meantime you can think it over and, if you have any suggestions to make about the part, I shall be glad to hear them." He stood up. "My congratulations," he said, as he held out his hand. "Good-night!"

Jules stumbled out of the hotel in a dream. "Two hundred francs!" he was muttering to himself. "Two hundred beautiful francs a week! And there are fifty-two weeks in a year! Heavens! What luck!"

He walked on mechanically, his head in the clouds. A laughing voice brought him back to earth with a start.

"Wake up, Whistler!" it said. "I've spoken to

you three times already. I'm going your way. Do you mind if I walk with you?"

Jules recognised the student and was quick to agree. "And, Monsieur," he said, "how can I ever thank you for your kindness in writing about me to your uncle? Two hundred francs a week for a year! It is unheard of."

"Not so much of the Monsieur, if you please," said the student. "Grey Wolf you called me and Grey Wolf I remain, to you."

"Well then, Grey Wolf," said Jules, almost incoherent. "Two hun——"

"Yes," replied the other, linking his arm in that of Jules, "it's not bad for a start. And then, you know, if you are a success, as I think you will be, it's bound to lead to other things. My uncle has taken a fancy to you and he is a great power in the theatrical world. If you go the right way about it he might do a lot for you. You do as he tells you and think the matter over. He'll be delighted if you can give him a new idea or two. Well, I turn off here. Good-night and my congratulations too," and he shook Jules' hand warmly, and moved off round a corner.

Jules walked slowly homewards trying hard to persuade himself that he, Jules Boldevin, the good-for-nothing, was shortly going to Paris, to appear at a famous theatre, for which priceless privilege he was to be paid two hundred francs a week!

"It can't be true," he moaned. "Something will happen in a moment and I shall wake up."

At that instant the something mentioned did happen! A voice rang out from a distance. "To me, Whistler! Help! Oh, help!"

Jules whirled round. "Grey Wolf!" he gasped.

Now Jules may have been a good-for-nothing but there had never been any question of his courage. He had inherited all the grim and stubborn fighting-spirit that had taken his father through six pitched battles and innumerable skirmishes during the Franco-Prussian War. Accordingly, he was speeding along the road taken by the student before the echo of the young fellow's voice had died away. He turned the corner, and saw a group of struggling men twenty yards down the street. The weak light of a street lamp showed for a moment Grey Wolf making manful play with his stick. Even as Jules looked, the stick went flying out of his hand.

"Courage, Grey Wolf!" shrieked Jules. "I come!"

The student heard, took new strength, and used his fists for all he was worth. A sand-bag whizzed by his ear, and he felled the man who was using it. Bounding back and forward almost in the same movement, he landed his right fist on the chin of another of his assailants, who went over like a log. At the same instant a knife glinted evilly in the lamplight—but it never fell,

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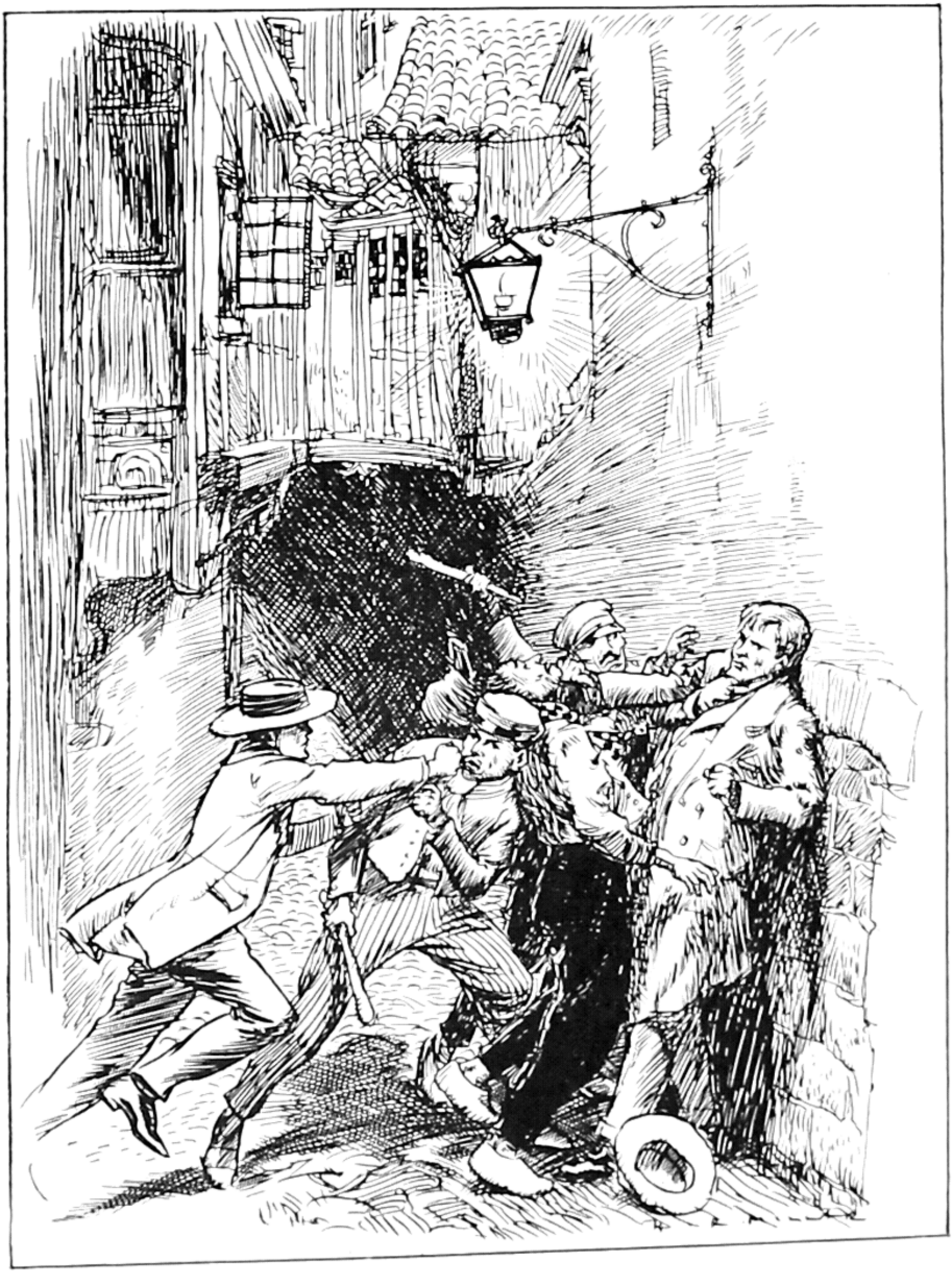
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JULES ARRIVED AT TOP SPEED

for Jules, arriving at top speed, hurled himself like a cannon-ball at the holder and sent him rolling over and over. "Back to back, Grey Wolf!" he cried, and proceeded to use both hands and feet in a manner that commanded the student's respectful admiration. There was some wild work for a moment or two, and then the group of Apaches, who had thought to find an easy prey in the student, broke and scattered in all directions as an *agent de police* came running up, revolver in hand.

"Warm work, Whistler," said the student, breathing heavily, as he felt himself tenderly. "You came up just in time. That ruffian with the knife would have got me. You've saved my life, old fellow. No talk of your being in my debt now. On the contrary, I owe you a good deal."

"Nonsense, Grey Wolf!" said Jules. "A bit of a scuffle like that, that's nothing."

"Oh, isn't it?" said the student. "Well, I think it is. I shan't forget this in a hurry. Good-night again, Whistler, and many thanks."

Jules resumed his journey home with the consciousness of having neatly concluded a good day's work. He waited until after supper before telling the family the wonderful news. The excitement produced was tremendous. Papa Boldevin was stunned by the amount of the salary; Mamma Boldevin and her daughter thought longingly of the presents Jules would

surely send them from Paris; Jules' brother was mentally rehearsing the few telling sentences in which he would inform his colleagues of his brother's rise to fame. Jules himself was almost too excited to eat, a phenomenal occurrence with him. But the climax was reached when Papa Boldevin solemnly rose to his full height, reached down a brand-new clay pipe from the shelf, filled it, and handed it to his son Jules, the good-for-nothing. In a profound silence he filled his own pipe. Then he thrust a slip of wood into the fire, secured a light and gravely offered it to Jules. Jules took it with a bow, lighted his pipe, and offered it to his father, who accepted it with another bow.

"Now," said the old man, with great satisfaction, "just tell us once again, my boy, the exact details of this affair!"

. . . . . .

Jules was just dropping off to sleep that night when he suddenly sat straight up in bed. "Well, upon my word," he said, "I clean forgot to tell them that I saved Grey Wolf's life this evening! Oh, well, I don't suppose it would interest them," and he closed his eyes again.

# HALF A CROWN

Swedish Embassy Westbourne
Rue 197.

Wayeen
8 Rue
1737.

13th Nov: Evening

# HALF A CROWN

THE day had been very hot, even for Cairo. About ten o'clock in the evening I set out for a walk. My idea was to take a little stroll first and then go to watch a game of pelota.

There were many people in the streets and the traffic-police were kept busy controlling the stream of cars and motor-buses that rolled by unceasingly.

A little Greek girl came up to me and asked me to buy a lottery-ticket. I refused, and she turned away and began to run across the road. I noticed that a tram was approaching. As she crossed the tram-lines her foot slipped and she fell directly in the path of the tram. She screamed; the tram-driver wrenched at his brakes and cursed fluently. I covered the distance in two jumps, grabbed the girl by the neck of her dress and threw her clear of the tram. As I followed her the tram missed me by an inch. The girl was unhurt, the only damage being a torn frock.

I resumed my walk.

I saw a game of pelota and left the building in a happy frame of mind because I had won twelve piastres. It was one of the best games I

have ever seen. Blue led all the way in spite of the desperate efforts made by Red to catch up. The score stood at twenty-eighteen in favour of Blue when Red's No. 3 made an almost impossible save and followed it up by a phenomenally well-placed return. The effect was most pronounced on the Blue stalwarts, and the Red team profited by scoring another point. Twenty all! The excitement was now intense and the clamour deafening. The supporters of Blue exhorted their chosen to deal unkindly with the opposition, while the now-enthusiastic backers of Red begged their men not to delay the funeral any longer, but to get on with it and let everybody go home. Play recommenced in an atmosphere that was electric, and when, after a superb rally, the winning point was notched by Red, I really thought the police reserves would have to be called out. As I had backed Red I had every reason to be cheered at the result, and proceeded to carry on with the programme I had arranged for myself.

The night was still young, so I went on to a café where I knew I could sit and watch people dancing. I ordered a glass of the beer for which the place was renowned, sat back and looked round. Presently a man came in and paused by my table to say "Good-evening!" I asked him to join me, as I knew him to be a good fellow. He was a German, and had served in the German Imperial Air Service during the Great War,

gaining the reputation of a brave and clean fighter.

We talked about various matters for a while, and then he said, *à propos* of nothing at all:

"I cannot understand you English."

"Well," I replied, "that's nothing to worry about. I don't think we understand ourselves."

"What I mean," he continued, "is that you don't act like other people at all. You are so placid in big things and yet you show the greatest excitement over matters that are of no importance."

"Well," I said, "that depends on what you call 'a matter of no importance.' It's a question of the point of view, of course."

"Look here," he went on. "This is the third time I have seen you to-night. I saw you risk your own life to save a dirty little girl from being killed, an hour or two ago."

"Nonsense!" I cried. "I did nothing of the kind."

"Yes," he persisted, "you did! And then you calmly walked away before she or anyone else could thank you."

"Well," said I, "what did you expect me to do? Was I to wait until someone stepped forward and presented me with a medal or an illuminated address?"

"Don't be silly," he said. "You know very well

what I mean. The second time I saw you was in the pelota building. You were showing the greatest excitement over a game, an ordinary game of pelota, and finally walked out of the building looking as if you owned the earth."

"Of course I did!" I exclaimed. "Why, it was a jolly good game, and I won twelve piastres all told! Twelve piastres, my lad!"

"There you are!" he cried triumphantly. "That is exactly what I mean. Who but an Englishman would save a life with the utmost calmness and then act like a lunatic because he had won twelve piastres?"

"Well, but," I expostulated, "I got the twelve piastres for nothing; then there was the fun of watching the game. There's nothing exciting about pushing a little girl away from a tram. Anyone could do that. But it takes a bit of skill to get twelve piastres at pelota, I give you my word. Twelve piastres! That's about half a crown, my friend. Half a crown for nothing!"

"Half a crown," muttered the German. "Half a crown, eh? Please don't talk to me about half-crowns. I know something about half-crowns. Every time I hear the words I get a pain in the chest."

"That unfortunate amount seems to be disturbing you," I said. "Well, we'll spend it. Here, waiter, some more beer!"

The waiter brought the beer, and the German,

who had been staring straight in front of him, began, in a low voice:

"I'll tell you why I think of half-crowns with disgust. One morning, during the War, I was driving my 'plane as hard as she would go towards the English coast. Another of our machines was flying well away to the right and was piloted by a friend of mine in the same squadron. Our instructions were to make for Southampton and find out what was happening there. We had heard reports of considerable activity among your shipping, and Headquarters wanted to know what it was all about.

"All went well until we were nicely over the English Channel and then we ran into a fog. You know what a fog in the Channel is like!"

"I do," I murmured sympathetically.

"Well," he continued, "in five seconds I was hopelessly lost. The other 'plane had disappeared completely. I dared not trust to my compass, for fog plays tricks with an aeroplane compass, and so there I was!"

"And what did you do then?" I asked.

"Oh, I just held on my course, hoping for the best," he said. "Presently, to my delight, we seemed to be driving through—apparently it was only local—and in a few minutes we were in a clear atmosphere again. I cheered as I saw the other 'plane not far away. My joy ceased abruptly as my observer telephoned frantically to me. He

had reason to be agitated! Coming towards us in beautiful formation, and already beginning to open out, preparatory to surrounding us, was a squadron of your fighting scouts!"

"That was unfortunate—for you!" I remarked.

"It *was*," he agreed, very emphatically.

"Well," I said. "What happened next?"

"Oh," he went on, "we were fairly caught. Escape was impossible. The only thing to do was to fight. Well, I had fought in the air before and knew what I could do. But there were six 'planes against us."

"Yes," I agreed. "Six to two! That's fairly heavy odds."

"You can imagine my astonishment, then," said the German, "when four of the English machines wheeled away on a new course, leaving only two to deal with us. That is what you call 'fair play,' isn't it?"

"That's right," I nodded.

"It wasn't right for me," said the German gloomily. "I just had time to note that my friend was preparing to engage the second English 'plane when the first was on top of me! As I said before, it was not the first time I had fought in the air and so I thought I knew what to expect. But the man who was piloting the English 'plane drove straight at me in a way that took my breath. Do what I would, I could not get my machine

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"I FELT THE 'PLANE FALLING, FALLING!"

where I wanted it! He anticipated every move I made and I quickly realised that he was easily my master. I now worked like a fiend to escape, but I knew it was only a question of time. Suddenly, I thought I saw an opening! My old 'bus wheeled in the air like a bird and, too late, I saw the trap! A stream of fire burst from the English 'plane, bullets sang through the stays, and my observer toppled forward, shot through the head!"

"Have some more beer," I said tactfully.

"Thanks," he said and drank. I was silent. Presently he went on again.

"I really felt helpless now, and my only hope was that chance might save me. I mounted, in a desperate attempt to get above my opponent, but the next moment I felt as though the whole top of my body had been knocked off. My hands slipped from the controls and I felt the 'plane falling—falling! Something whipped round my neck and began to strangle me, and then everything went black as 'plane and I hit the water with a crash that makes me sick even now when I think of it."

"Look here," I said, "don't tell me any more if it upsets you."

"Oh," said the German smilingly, "it's old history now. Besides I want to tell you of the funny thing that happened afterwards."

"Carry on, then," said I.

"When I eventually recovered consciousness,"

he continued, "I found myself in a hospital ward with a red-faced, capable-looking gentleman, in a long white coat, gazing intently at me."

" 'What has happened?' I asked, wildly looking around.

" 'Well,' said he, 'you've been shot in four places, then hanged and, finally, drowned. But there's nothing seriously wrong with you and you'll soon be about again!'

" 'Shot, hanged, drowned,' I muttered, 'and there's nothing seriously wrong with me. Oh!'

" 'Yes,' he said, 'it was lucky for you that one of our destroyers was beneath you, watching the fight. They had a boat all ready to pick up the bits and, when it got to you, the men found that one of the stays of your aeroplane had wrapped itself round your throat and was keeping your head under water, in addition to choking you. They quickly got it loose but, by that time, you had swallowed quite a lot of water. However, you're all right now. By the way, if you have no ill-feeling in the matter, the man who sent you here would like to come to talk with you to-morrow."

" 'I should be pleased to see him,' I murmured, 'and I think I'll go to sleep now, thank you.'

" 'Best thing you can do,' he said cheerfully, and went off to the next patient.

"Next day I was feeling, comparatively speaking, much better. Presently a young fellow, in

the English Air Force uniform, came in and asked me how I felt. He scarcely waited for me to answer before bursting into an apology for having, as he said, knocked me out.

" 'Rotten thing,' he said, 'to be downed like that! Hope they're looking after you here all right. Anything I can do for you?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'you can tell me one thing. I have fought in the air before, but I have never seen anything like the—shall I say, ferocity of your attack. You came at me like a mad dog. Do you always fight like that?'

" 'Well,' he said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, 'to tell the truth, I *was* a bit keen. You see, I had a bet on with a fellow in our squadron that I would bring down a German 'plane before he did, and, by Jove, I won! You crashed just two minutes before your pal hit the water and—oh! I'm sorry, didn't you know?'

" 'No,' I said quietly, 'I had forgotten all about my poor friend. Was he picked up?'

"The airman shook his head and was silent. After a minute or so I said:

" 'So you put up the finest bit of air-fighting I have ever seen on account of a bet. Is that it?'

" 'That's right,' said the airman, cheerful again.

" 'May I ask what was the amount of the bet?' I enquired curiously.

" 'Certainly,' said he. 'Half a crown!'

"I lay back, dazed.

" 'Then it amounts to this,' I gasped. 'Two German 'planes have been destroyed, one of our best pilots and two observers killed, myself shot, partly hanged and almost drowned—all for half a crown!!'

" 'Well, if you put it that way, I suppose you're right,' the young man replied.

" 'I think,' said I, 'if you don't mind, I will now spend a few hours quietly working this out.'

"The young airman smiled, bade me a kindly farewell and departed."

. . . . . .

"Now, my friend," said the German, "you know why the mention of half a crown gives me a pain."

I laughed. "What was the young man's name?" I asked.

"Lomax," said the German, "of the *n*th Squadron."

"What!" exclaimed I. "Not Jimmy Lomax!"

"That's the man," said he. "Do you know him?"

"Of course I do," I replied. "I know him well, and, now I come to think of it, he once told me that, while he was stationed on the South Coast, he had had a bit of excitement over the Channel with a German 'plane."

"A bit of excitement," gasped the German. "A bit of—oh, you English!!!"

# THE HAUNTED BUNGALOW

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# THE HAUNTED BUNGALOW

## I

HALF A DOZEN of us were sitting round the fire at the Club the other night, talking on various subjects, when someone chanced to mention ghosts. At once the question sprang up as to whether anyone present actually believed in ghosts, or had had any personal experience of such uncanny visitations. Almost everyone sitting there had some curious story to relate of odd events happening at odd times and in odd places. Finally, the Colonel, who had been listening quietly to the various speakers, said, "I had a very queer experience myself once some years ago. In the end it proved rather useful, but, at the time, it was very unpleasant, and I know that I was a much-frightened man."

We all looked at him with interest. Anything that had frightened the Colonel was certain to be out of the common. The quiet-looking, middle-aged gentleman who was known by that name had the reputation of being one of the most recklessly brave men in the Army. He was entitled to put the letters V.C. and D.S.O. after his name, and the men who had served under him,

and to whom he was always known as "Old Fix Bay'nets," swore that he had earned these rare decorations a dozen times over.

We sat back comfortably in our chairs and someone said, "Go on, Colonel."

"Well," he began, "about twenty years ago I was sent up to a hill station in India to act as adjutant to a volunteer rifle battalion. I lived at the Club for a time until I got to know my way about, and then set out to look for a bungalow of my own. Most of the places I saw were not at all suitable; they were evidently intended for a man with a family and a score of servants. At last, however, I found the very place I was looking for. I went over it carefully and decided that it might have been made for me. It was a solidly built stone affair and, from the verandah, one had a glorious view of the Hills.

I mentioned my discovery at the Club that night, and announced my decision to take the place and move in as soon as the necessary cleaning-down had been done. I added that I could not understand why such a desirable little place was standing empty and had, moreover, from its uncared-for aspect, evidently been standing empty for a long time. There was an uncomfortable silence for a moment or two, and then one of the men said, "If I were you, old man, I wouldn't take that bungalow."

"Why not?" I asked. "It's the very place for me."

"Well," he answered, "if you want to know the truth, the last two men who lived in it were found shot dead."

"What!" I cried. "Murdered?"

He shook his head.

"Suicide, then," I suggested.

"I don't know," he replied gravely. "No one knows."

"But," I persisted, "it must have been one or the other."

"All I can say is," he said, "that the two men had been shot dead with their own revolvers."

"Tell me all about it," I demanded, in despair at this vague statement.

"There is very little to tell," he replied. "Everyone here knows the facts. Henrick, of the Gunners, was the first. He was a cheerful sort of fellow, without a care in the world; he had plenty of money and was very popular. He dined at the Club one evening and played one or two hands of bridge. Then we sat round talking for a while. I remember that we were talking of dacoits, and he said, with a laugh, that he would be sorry for any dacoit who paid a visit to *his* bungalow. The next morning he was found by his bearer, lying on the floor of his bedroom, dressed in his pyjamas and with a bullet in his head. His revolver was near his right hand, and there was a look of the most intense surprise on his face. The revolver was empty and the walls farthest

from him were spattered with bullet-holes. He had evidently been shooting at something or someone."

"That seems queer," I said.

"It *was* queer," he went on, "very queer! The most careful examination of the doors and windows revealed nothing. No one had entered the bungalow from outside. And yet Henrick, a thoroughly sane, ordinary young man, had blazed away five shots at something and then, apparently, been driven into shooting himself."

"He must have made an awful row," I said. "Why didn't the servants come to see what was happening?"

"There was some big affair on in the Bazaar," my informant replied, "and Henrick had given them the night off. That was why he was dining at the Club."

"Well," I said, after a pause, "what about the second man?"

"He," said my informant, "was Kerson, a Sapper. He was very different from Henrick; a quiet, cold-blooded sort of fellow with a complete indifference to danger. I have known him follow up a wounded leopard on foot in the most casual way. He took on the bungalow soon after the tragedy and lived comfortably there for about a year. Then, one morning, the Station was horrified to learn that *he* had been found

dead, shot through the heart. Some of us tore off to the bungalow and found him, also in his pyjamas, lying sideways on his bed. The revolver had slipped from his right hand to the floor. Again the walls were spattered with shots that he had evidently fired while kneeling on his bed. Curiously enough, in his case, we found that there was still a cartridge in his revolver, unfired. His face bore a look of grim ferocity; the lips were drawn back from the teeth in a snarl of rage. Once again we made a most careful examination, but it was of no use. No one could possibly have got into the bungalow. His bearer, a married man, had gone to his own home at the usual time the previous night, and had discovered the tragedy on taking in his master's morning tea. No, it seemed pretty obvious that the thing that killed Henrick had killed Kerson. Since that time no one has been anxious to live there. The place is known as 'The Haunted Bungalow,' and people, especially natives, won't go near it after dark. One suicide you might understand, but *two*, under exactly similar circumstances—well, you can draw your own conclusions."

The other men sitting there looked at me in silence. They seemed to have nothing to add to what had been said, but it was obvious that they would consider me the worst kind of fool if I took the bungalow. At the same time, I got the impression that I was, so to speak, being tested,

and that my popularity might depend, to a very large extent, on the action I took in the matter. I went to bed that night with very mixed feelings, but, in the morning, I found myself laughing at the idea that I should be scared of taking the place simply because two poor fellows, probably in a moment of temporary insanity, had deliberately taken their own lives in it. It was, of course, a queer coincidence that two men, of such different natures, should have done the same thing, and it wasn't a nice sort of history for a place to have, but if a soldier is going to admit that he is afraid of any single thing on earth, well, then, he had better throw up his job at once. Accordingly I decided to take the bungalow, in spite of its sinister reputation.

## II

Well, I duly moved in, although there was a lot of shaking of heads and much well-meant attempt at dissuasion. I could see, however, quite clearly that my reputation would not suffer from my apparent recklessness.

The first night I slept there I took certain precautions. I went round the bungalow after my bearer had departed for the night and personally inspected the doors and window-shutters. All were in good condition and secure. It was about mid-November and beginning to get

rather chilly at nights, so I sat in front of a wood-fire in my sitting-room until 11 P.M. when I went to bed. Before getting into bed, however, I put my drawn sword on a little table by my bed-side within easy reach of my hand. It was a useful cut-and-thrust blade and has served me well on many occasions. I had made up my mind that, as the other two men had been unfortunate with their revolvers, I would see what a little cold steel would do, in case anyone or anything paid *me* a visit during the night. You will observe that I wasn't quite so sure of the suicide theory as I have made out.

I went to sleep in due time and was awakened by my bearer with the usual cup of tea next morning. There was a distinct look of relief on his face as he handed it to me. Evidently he also had heard the history of the bungalow.

Everyone I met that day wanted to know what had happened and, when I was forced to admit that I had slept soundly all through the night, I was answered by ominous remarks of, "Well, we shall see!"

I lived in the bungalow about six weeks without incident, except that, one morning, the bearer explained the fact of my bath being late by saying that he had found two rats drowned in it, and had had to change the water the water-carrier had put in overnight and clean out the bath. I took this story as an excuse for unpunctu-

ality but, later on, came to realise its bearing on the events that followed.

Towards the end of December the man at the Club who had told me the story of the two unfortunates who had preceded me came to me and said, very seriously, "Look here, old man. Take my advice and leave that bungalow for a week or two. This is about the time when those two poor fellows were found shot."

I laughed at his grave face but thanked him for his well-meant advice and assured him that he would not find *me* shot. He shook his head thoughtfully and went off muttering to himself. That very night I got the worst fright of my life!

The weather was by now distinctly cold, and I had a roaring fire in my sitting-room. I was very glad to see it blazing so cheerfully when I got back from the Club, where I had been dining with some kindred spirits. I stood with my back to the blaze and looked round. The various connecting-doors in the bungalow were always left open so that the heat from the sitting-room might be diffused through the different rooms and, particularly, pass into my bedroom. I had a fireplace there, but I have never liked the idea of going to sleep in a room with a fire in it, and so the fireplace was never used.

I was feeling rather tired and sleepy, and so, after having made my nightly inspection of doors

and shutters, went into my bedroom. Here I undressed and slipped into my pyjamas as quickly as possible, for it was definitely chilly in the bedroom after the warmth of the sitting-room. I closed the doors leading into sitting-room and dressing-room. Then I picked up my sword and swung it once or twice to make sure it was all right. Finally, I turned out the lamp, which stood on the mantelpiece, got into bed and fell asleep almost at once.

I am telling you exactly what I did so that you may see that I took every precaution against intruders. Although I had laughed at my Club friend's warning, there was the recollection of the two dead men to prevent me from being unduly mirthful. Anyway, I had quite made up my mind that, if steady watchfulness could do anything, *I* would not be found dead some bright morning, shot or otherwise.

Now, like many other men, I am a sound sleeper, and yet am awakened instantly by an unusual noise. Therefore, when I found myself stark, staring awake at what, I take it, must have been about 2 A.M., I knew that something out of the common had awakened me. The room was in complete darkness, and I lay perfectly still and listened. For a moment I heard nothing, and then, to my ears, came the sound of stealthy footsteps on the floor. There was a silence, then again two or three slow, short steps!

You must know that the floor of the room was of the ordinary wooden planking, scrubbed clean, with a few skins of deer, leopard and so forth thrown down here and there. The thought flashed into my mind that the person or thing in the room was alternately treading on a skin and the wooden floor.

I reached out my right hand for my sword and felt a warm glow of satisfaction as my fingers closed over the hilt. Then, equally silently, I drew up my knees, cleared my legs of the bed-clothes and so made ready. I can honestly say that, at this moment, I did not feel at all frightened, merely very cold. I waited steadily. To my straining ears, the footsteps were definitely coming nearer, slowly but surely. They seemed to be within a yard or two of the bed and about in a line with my knees. Also, I detected a curious musky smell, very faint but quite recognisable. A vision came into my mind of some naked, grease-anointed hill-man, knife in hand, murder in his heart, creeping towards me. Another instant and, with a yell, I leapt clear of the bed, my sword-point stabbing at the spot where I judged the intruder to be. As my feet touched the ground I swung the sword in a vicious, circling cut that would have taken the head off a man's shoulders. Point and blade alike met empty air! I moved about the room in the darkness, stabbing and cutting, but gaining nothing for my pains.

After a minute or two I desisted. I dropped the sword on the bed and groped my way to the lamp, which I lighted. I threw a rapid glance round, ready to meet any attack. The room was *quite empty!* Well, I leave you to imagine my state of mind. I tell you that I was the most astonished man in India. I just stood and gaped. Presently I went and sat on the edge of the bed and reviewed the state of affairs. One thing was certain: I *had heard* the footsteps. I had not been dreaming. And yet I was the only person in the room; there was no doubt about that. I looked at the two doors. Both were closed as I myself had left them. In desperation, I picked up my sword again, took the lamp in my left hand and went carefully through every room in the bungalow. I found nothing.

I went back to my bedroom, put the sword in its usual place, turned out the lamp and got into bed again. There I lay awake trying to find a solution to the mystery. The idea of a ghost I put aside without hesitation. The footsteps I had heard were those of a living being. Anyone who has lived in the East knows too well the sound of bare feet on a wooden floor to be mistaken. I had got thus far in my thoughts when, to my utter consternation, I again heard the footsteps. And again they were coming towards the bed. This time I confess that I was frightened, and frightened badly. You see, I *knew* that there was

no one in the bungalow but myself, and I *knew* that I was wide awake. I grabbed at my sword and hurled myself out of bed like a thunderbolt, slashing and thrusting in all directions. Again I met empty air! I crouched like a cat, sword at the point, waiting for the slightest sound that would mark out my visitor's whereabouts. There was a complete silence.

I was, by this time, beginning to get somewhat hysterical, but I made a great effort and walked to the lamp and, once again, lighted it. I sat on the bed again and compelled myself to think calmly. It was clear that there was someone or something in the bungalow, some presence that would not face the light, some agency that had already caused the death of two good men. I began to feel that, if I did not find out the truth, I should go mad. I decided to try an experiment. I got up and lowered the wick of the lamp until it gave just enough light to enable me to distinguish the various objects in the room. Then I went back to my bed and lay down with my sword beside me. I waited a minute, two minutes, with every sense on the alert. Three minutes, and then, sure enough, came the sound of naked, padding feet. I glanced quickly round the room; it was empty. And yet I could hear the feet distinctly and, moreover, they were approaching my bed. I felt the hair rising on my head but I forced myself to keep calm. There *must* be some

explanation. Was it possible that the sound was due to something in the room which could be seen if I looked carefully enough? I lay on my bed and scrutinised every inch of the ground. My eyes were getting accustomed to the gloom by this time and, presently, I detected a slightly darker shadow at the foot of the door leading to the sitting-room. The sound of footsteps continued but came no nearer. I concentrated all my attention on the mysterious shadow and, suddenly, with a shock, I realised that the sound was coming from that particular spot. I made a slight movement and, instantly, the shadow darted to the fireplace and disappeared. The sound of footsteps stopped. I waited a moment or two and, as I expected, the shadow reappeared and made for the door again. Immediately came the sound of naked feet padding over the floor!

But now I was no longer puzzled. I had found the real cause. I got up and, walking across the room, opened the door of my dressing-room, from which there was no practical outlet. Then I got a light cane and sat down on the bed to wait. The shadow again drifted to the door leading to the sitting-room. At once I jumped to the fireplace, thus cutting off its retreat. As I had anticipated, it darted straight for the open door of my dressing-room and plunged through. I walked across and closed the door. I then raised the wick of my lamp and, placing the cane under

my arm, opened the door of my dressing-room again and stepped in, bearing the lamp aloft. My midnight visitor retreated before the light and, closing the door behind me and placing the lamp on the dressing-room table, I had a good look at him as he crouched in the corner farthest from the door.

"My friend," said I, very gravely, "prepare for death!" I advanced towards him. I saw him look round and realise that he was cornered. His only way out was cut off. He looked round again and then, without the slightest hesitation, took a short run and leapt straight at me! Well, I may not be much good with a revolver—indeed, at that time, I was probably the worst revolver-shot in the Army—but, when it comes to sword-play or single-stick work, I can really show you something. Accordingly, as he hurtled through the air, I stepped back one pace and brought the cane down, clean as a whistle, across his back. He fell at my feet, quivered once or twice and rolled over, dead as a door-nail. I contemplated him in silence as he lay there. A good-sized rat, that was all!

I bethought me of the rats the bearer had found drowned in my bath. There came into my mind a picture of a rat creeping, through the hole in the bathroom wall, into the welcome warmth of the bungalow from the cold world out-of-doors. It gets as far as the bedroom, and



"MY FRIEND," SAID I, "PREPARE FOR DEATH!"

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then I come in, closing all doors. While I am moving about, it lies hidden in the fireplace. Then, when I am asleep, it ventures out and, attracted by the warmth of the other room or scenting something good to eat, deliberately sets to work to gnaw its way through the connecting door. The sound it makes is exactly and uncannily that of padding feet, and so wakes me up, with the results I have described.

I began to feel chilly as my excitement died down, and, closing the door on my dead visitor, went back to my bedroom. Here I put on my dressing-gown and, lighting a cigarette, began to think things out. Everything was fairly clear by now. I could well imagine the effect of the same sinister noise on the two men who had preceded me in the bungalow. The young Henrick would leap out of bed and, seizing his revolver, blaze away with a whole-hearted desire to demolish his visitor as swiftly as possible. I could picture the look of bewilderment growing on his face as he sent shot after shot through the room but heard no sound of a falling body. But—and here my beautiful reconstruction ended—I could not picture him sending the last shot into his own head. Was it possible that the rat, if it were a rat, as in my own case, had become terrified at the shooting and had flown at his throat? If that were so, Henrick, feeling the claws and teeth scrabbling at his flesh, might have turned the

revolver towards his assailant and, by pure bad luck, have shot himself instead. I admit that the explanation seemed weak, but it was the only theory that presented itself to me to account for Henrick's death. Moreover, even granted that it was the right theory, it would not explain Kerson's death. By all accounts, there was nothing reckless about Kerson. He had been described to me as a man of cool courage, afraid of nothing. I could see him, in my mind's eye, the night of his death, kneeling on his bed, revolver in hand, and shooting coldly, deliberately, leaving no area unsearched by his deadly bullets. I had been told that his face, when he was found, bore a look of grim ferocity. There could be no doubt about it; when Kerson died, he was definitely shooting to kill. And yet he had not fired his sixth shot! I gave it up in despair, turned out the light and, worn out by excitement, fell into a troubled sleep.

## III

The next morning, when my bearer came in with my tea, I merely told him that I had killed a rat during the night, and directed him to get the body removed, and have a bit of wire-netting put in front of the hole in the bathroom wall through which the waste-water flowed. Then I went off to find my Club friend. I told him

the whole story and he listened with a very grave face indeed. When I had finished, he said just what I had expected him to say.

"I think you have described what happened, in all probability, to both Henrick and Kerson, pretty well. I remember, now, that I noted two or three scratches on Henrick's chest—his pyjama coat was open at the neck—but I paid no attention to them at the time. I should imagine that the rat, if it were a rat, *did* leap at his throat—from the bed, probably—but that won't account for the bullet-wound in his head. It was in the forehead, not at the side. Besides, there were no scratches on Kerson and *he* was shot through the heart."

"I know," I said gloomily. "The mystery seems almost as deep as ever."

We talked for a little while and finally came to the conclusion that, although my adventure during the night might account for a good deal, it was not, by any means, the final solution of the problem. We then separated, and I went back to the bungalow and got out my revolver. I filled a pocket with cartridges and proceeded to arrange for a little revolver-practice. I mentioned, a while back, that I was probably the worst revolver-shot in the Army, and I was very anxious to improve my shooting. I don't know what you think about it, but *my* idea of a good revolver-shot is a man who can hit a sardine-tin

at twenty paces five times out of six. That was the goal I had set myself, and I was resolved to practise until I attained my ambition. This particular morning I placed a piece of white cardboard, about the size of a dinner-plate, against the hill-side that ran out from my bungalow. Then, standing about fifteen paces away, I began to shoot. My bearer was sitting about twenty yards to the left of the target, hard at work cleaning a shot-gun. I had fired four or five times, noticing each time, with deep regret, that I had clean missed the target, when suddenly my bearer uttered a yelp of astonishment and, dropping the shot-gun, began to rub his leg vigorously. I walked over to him, to find out what was the matter, and found him looking at a piece of lead he was holding in one hand while he rubbed vigorously with the other. Evidently a portion of my last bullet had ricochetted and given him a sharp blow. I directed him to move farther off—a command he obeyed with alacrity—and went back to my shooting.

My next two shots actually hit the target, not in the centre, certainly, but they *did* hit it. I was very pleased with myself and levelled the revolver very carefully with the intention of landing a bullet clean in the bull's eye. I pressed the trigger and, almost simultaneously, received a tremendous blow on the chest! I nearly dropped the revolver as I staggered back. With the ex-

ample of the bearer fresh in my mind, I looked at my feet. Then I bent down slowly and picked up a misshapen piece of lead about the size of a hazel-nut. It was a revolver bullet, the very bullet I had fired that moment at the target.

"Lucky for me I wasn't standing nearer the target," I muttered. "If I had been, that bullet wouldn't have dropped at—— Good God! I wonder if——" I stopped muttering. A great light had flashed into my mind. I ran to the hill-side and, snatching away my target, began to examine the face of the hill. I pushed aside the grass and small plants. Here and there, in the soil, were pieces of stone, remnants of the original rock of which the hill had been composed when first it was heaved skywards by some gigantic convulsion of Nature. I examined each piece thus exposed very carefully, and presently found splashes of lead on two or three of them. I took out my knife and tried to make some impression, but in vain. The rock was as hard as crystal. Any bullet touching such rock at the slightest angle would be hurled aside with terrific force and hit a target quite different from the one intended.

My mind was now working at lightning speed. Suppose the bungalow had been built of stone taken from the hill-side. Suppose pieces of this hard rock had been used to form the walls, their uneven surfaces being faced up with cement.

Suppose some pieces, here and there, came very near the surface of the wall and were covered with only a thin layer of plaster. Suppose such a wall in a bedroom, and lastly, suppose a man firing a heavy revolver in such a bedroom. Why—and here I shouted aloud in my excitement—Heaven alone knew what might be the effect of such shooting!

I yelled to my bearer, who came running up to me, dropped the revolver into his wavering hands and tore off to find my Club friend again. I was fortunate in meeting him almost at once.

"Look here," I said, fairly stammering in my eagerness. "Do you remember that bungalow being built?"

"Of course," he replied, in some surprise. "It's only a few years old."

"Where did the builders get the stone from?" I demanded.

"From the hill-side, of course," he said. "They had to cut away the hill to make a place for the bungalow and they used the stone they blasted out for their building. Why do you ask?"

"Because," I shouted, "I now know how Henrick and Kerson were killed!"

"Steady, old man," he advised. "You've not been in the sun, have you?"

"Yes, I have," I gabbled. "No, I've not, I mean—oh, look here——" and I hastily told him about my revolver-practice. He listened

quietly. When I had come to the end of a somewhat disjointed account, "It's possible," he muttered. "A ricochet bullet might do anything. Why, I remember a case——" He stopped and said quietly, "But how can we prove it?" "I've thought of a way," I answered. "Can you come to the bungalow?" "This minute," he replied.

Without more ado we set off and, once there, I told him what I had in mind. With the aid of a couple of boxes and a broom-head we obtained a fair representation of a man standing erect about the spot where poor Henrick's body was found. They were fairly solid boxes and we backed them up with a heavy chest of drawers. Then, to the side of one, we fastened my revolver, cleaned and loaded, at about the height of a man's shoulder. To the trigger of the revolver I attached, very firmly, a long piece of stout cord which I passed through the window behind the boxes. The revolver was now pointing at the wall away from the bed. I warned my bearer to keep out of the way, and we closed all doors. Then we got through the window and crouched behind the wall. I pushed the shutters into place and said, "Ready?"

My friend nodded and I jerked the cord. There was the roar of a shot within the room. After a moment we climbed into the room again, carefully avoiding the cord, and examined the wall. The bullet was embedded in it. We

altered the direction of the revolver slightly, climbed through the window again and repeated the performance. Another bullet-hole in the wall. Unwearyingly we fired shot after shot, altering the direction of the revolver-muzzle every time. The fourth bullet, to my complete satisfaction, had ricochetted practically at right angles to the line of fire and was buried in the wall on the left of the window. I pointed this out to my friend and he felt some of my excitement. "It looks as though we were on the right track," he admitted.

We had soon reloaded the revolver twice, and were beginning to feel that it was tiring work climbing in and out of bedroom windows. But we stuck at it, knowing that, sooner or later, we should get the truth. We climbed in for, I think, the sixteenth time, and I was looking round for the new bullet-hole—I forgot to mention that I had ringed each hole as it was made, with a lead-pencil—when I heard a startled exclamation from my friend. I swung round and found him gazing intently at the topmost box. I jumped towards him.

"You were right," he said slowly, and pointed to a hole in the wood from which a morsel of lead was still protruding. I stood by the boxes and we found that the hole was just on a level with my chest. Together we went over the wall and found the place where the bullet should have been. In silence I pointed to the hard stone

showing clear. It was of the same kind as I had uncovered in the hill-side and had been concealed by the merest skin of plaster.

There was no need for further proof. We demolished the box and broom erection, after unfastening the revolver, and went into my sitting-room to talk the matter over.

"It is quite clear now," said my Club friend. "I take it that both men were awakened in the same way as yourself. Thinking, as you did at first, that there was an armed thief in the room, they naturally shot in self-defence. In Henrick's case it was the sixth bullet that must have ricochetted almost straight back at him just as yours did in your revolver-practice. Kerson was knocked out by the fifth shot, which probably performed a double ricochet. Who knows? After our combined experiences I am ready to believe anything. It was just pure bad luck in each case. We fired nearly twenty shots before we got the same result. They, poor lads, got it almost at once. The room was a veritable death-trap for them." He shook his head sadly.

"Well," I said, "I'm thankful for three things. First and foremost, that I've cleared up the mystery; second, that I killed that rat, and last, and most important, that I'm the worst revolver-shot in the Army. If *I* had used my revolver last night instead of my sword, who knows? Perhaps——"

"It won't bear thinking of," said my friend. "Well, come along to the Club, and we'll tell the other fellows that the haunted bungalow is haunted no longer."

. . . . . .

The Colonel looked round at us all.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of it?" We looked at one another. At length someone answered, "As your Club friend said, Colonel, it won't bear thinking of." And we all got up to go home.

THE END

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